AGAPĒ: EMBRACING CLEAN PAIN AND REIMAGINING A RECONCILIATORY PATHWAY TOWARDS RESTORATION OF DEHUMANIZED BLACK BODIES AND CONTINUED DISCOURSE ON THE DECOLONIZATION OF THE BLACK CHURCH

By

LOPEZ-JOËL DAUTRUCHE

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ABSTRACT

AGAPĒ: EMBRACING CLEAN PAIN AND REIMAGINING A RECONCILIATORY PATHWAY TOWARDS RESTORATION OF DEHUMANIZED BLACK BODIES AND CONTINUED DISCOURSE ON THE DECOLONIZATION OF THE BLACK CHURCH

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My dissertation, driven by the challenge statement: "Birthed into the African Diaspora and theologically groomed through colonized Christianity, I am one of many who have embodied a synthetic faith. As a result of embodying a synthetic faith in the Black Church, we have been unable to live into ourselves as the image and imitation of God, as revealed in the lived life of Jesus Christ." Consequently, my dissertation's aim was to explore avenues for decolonizing Christianity within the twenty-first century Black Church. I focused on three central inquiries: What is the concept of decolonization within the context of the Black Church, and what implications does it hold? How does the deconstruction of the Black Church manifest? What trajectory does the Black Church follow in the twenty-first century as it journeys toward reconciliation?

To explore these questions, I adopted a multifaceted approach through three distinct methodologies. Firstly, I developed a sermon series focused on themes of decolonization and reconciliation within the Black Church. This series aimed to guide marginalized communities towards personal wholeness through interpretations of scripture informed by Liberation and Process theology. Secondly, I created a Hip Hop and Theology podcast to expose individuals of diverse belief systems to the concept of a relational God revealed in Hip Hop music. This theo-poetic exploration presented Hip Hop lyrics as gospel (good news), nurturing deeper connections with oneself and the Divine. Finally, I designed an online course inviting participants to engage

with a relational understanding of God, emphasizing God's ongoing revelation to humanity as we nurture closer relationships with ourselves and the Divine.

Throughout these methodologies, I reflected on the historical trajectory of the Black Church and the Black Body toward decolonization and reconciliation. While some may choose to remain in "Dirty Pain," characterized by avoidance and denial of the agapē love ethic exemplified by Jesus' life, others embark on a journey of "Clean Pain." Though fraught with the challenges of confronting difficult truths and experiences, this path towards embodying and sharing agapē love, as prescribed in the Gospels, fosters growth and healing. By acknowledging and understanding our wounds, we create space for forgiveness, compassion, and ultimately, liberation. This "Clean Pain," akin to the yeast in Jesus' parables (Matthew 13:33 NRSV), even in microscopic quantities, holds the power to propel humanity toward reconciliation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation project has echoed the trajectory of my growth, marked by the transformative process of "Clean Pain," throughout my academic journey at New York Theological Seminary (NYTS) spanning over eight years. From earning a Certificate in Christian Ministry to pursuing a Master of Divinity focused on Black Liberation Theology and Process Theology and culminating in a Doctor of Ministry within a multi-faith program, each step has been imbued with profound significance and meaning. This dissertation represents not only the culmination of years of dedicated study and research but also a testament to the unwavering support and guidance I have received from numerous individuals along the way. Having embarked on this complex journey of decolonization and reconciliation, I would not have reached this milestone without the guidance and support of several remarkable individuals. First and foremost, I want to express my deepest gratitude to my academic advisors who have nurtured my understanding and challenged me to reach new heights in my scholarship.

To my advisor The Rev. Dr. Malachy M. Williams PhD ThD, who stepped in only in July 2023 as a replacement in the last phase of the implementation of the project, I extend my deepest gratitude. Your unwavering commitment to pushing me to be my very best, both in the implementation of the project and in writing the dissertation, has been invaluable. Your guidance in embodying the agapē love ethic, which forms the core of my research, has profoundly influenced my scholarship. To my former advisor Rev. Dr. Cecelia Williams Bryant, who was forced to step down for personal reasons, I express my heartfelt appreciation. Your guidance has been instrumental in shaping my journey, guiding me from mere head knowledge to heartfelt understanding of my calling. And to Rev. Rafael Reyes, PhD, you have been not only an

educator, mentor, and friend but also a catalyst for my spiritual growth. Your encouragement to embrace imagination as a tool for liberation, decolonization, and reconciliation with the Divine has left an indelible mark on my academic and personal journey. The three of you have played a pivotal role in guiding my research for this dissertation.

To my Site Team – Dr. Marie Yola Dautruche, Rev. Dr. Valerie Hope Holly, Rev. Shanea Leonard, and Rev. James Perry – I extend my deepest thanks for your unwavering support, advice, and encouragement, especially during moments of doubt. Your guidance in praxis and methodology development and your meticulous reading of several iterations of my proposal and dissertation have been invaluable. To my Colleagues, your support, advice, and collaborative efforts have been a source of strength throughout this journey of "Clean Pain." Aaron Waldron, your parallel journey, as a Black Body, alongside mine has been both inspiring and transformative. Your unwavering commitment to inclusivity and liberation in our shared pursuit of a closer relationship with the Most Divine God has been deeply impactful. Additionally, I am deeply grateful to Resmaa Menakem, I offer my deepest gratitude for your invaluable individual sessions during training and for championing the development of a somatic theological framework as a critical step towards liberation and the revolutionary pursuit of agapē love.

To my Hip Hop and Theology crew – JP Reynolds, Kid Lacey, Rev. Roosevelt Sheriff of the Boogie Boys, Nnabu Gogoh, and once again Aaron Waldron – I extend my heartfelt thanks for joining me on this revolutionary journey of continuing to discover the Divine within secular spaces. Your willingness to share the "good news" in unconventional ways has been both enlightening and empowering. To Pastor Mike Walrond of First Corinthian Baptist Church and all those who participated in the Black Church, White Religion class, I express my sincere appreciation for your openness and transparency. Your willingness to engage in conversations

about the decolonization and reconciliation of the Black Church and Body to God within the very doors of the Black Church has been both inspiring and affirming.

Finally, I want to extend my deepest gratitude to my family for their unwavering emotional, moral, and spiritual support throughout my dissertation process and my journey into ministry. To my children, Lou, Imena, and Baby Deuce, I pray that this transformational journey will serve as a foundation for anchoring your faith in the embodiment of agapē love, both within yourselves and in the world around you. And to Maria Smith Dautruche, your support, guidance, and unwavering presence have been the cornerstone of my journey. If I had ten-thousand tongues, I could not thank you enough. Without you by my side, none of this would have been possible. Thank you for being my rock and my guiding light when I was trying to discern God's call in my life. Thank you for journeying alongside me and both lifting me up when I was down and grounding me when necessary. Without you to walk alongside me in journey I could not have been successful. From the depths of my heart and my soul, thank you Maria.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

I, Lopez-Joël Dautruche, am a *Black Body*[1] that has been seen as a representative of the *Black Church*.[2] On Sunday, August 2022, I experienced a physical exhibition that caused me to realize the truth of the previous statement when a *White*[3] police officer ventured to have me profiled for driving a luxury vehicle shortly after leaving Church. Earlier in church the sermon centered on Psalm 80,[4] which laments the exile of an oppressed body of people. The main points that the speaker wanted to remind the Church of in choosing this text was that:

[1] James Hal Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1970), 12, 63. Cone defines Black as an experience that has a person exist in a system of white [Empire] racism, a life of humiliation, and suffering. Blackness symbolizes both oppression, and liberation in any society. Because Blacks have come to know themselves as Black, and because that Blackness is the cause of their own love of themselves, the blackness of God is key to knowledge of God. There is no place for a colorless - non-oppressed - God in a society where human beings suffer precisely because of being identified as Black. Either God is identified with the oppressed to the point that their experience becomes God's experience or God is a God of colonialism.

[2] Henry Louis Gates, "The History and Importance of the Black Church," Harvard Gazette (Harvard Gazette, June 3, 2022), https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2021/03/the-history-and-importance-of-the-black-church/. For this thesis I will identify the Black Church - Non-Denominational, Christian and Muslim - as the cultural edifice that Black Bodies created to combat the subversive system of enslavement that sought to destroy their humanity and crush their spirit. Thus, for Black Bodies, the Black Church is a conduit of survival traced directly to the miraculous ways that our ancestors reinvented the religion of the colonizer and reclaim a means of freedom and liberation for all oppressed Bodies. The liberatory shift in Black Bodies affirmed their and likewise our identity as divine Bodies.

[3] When using the word *White*, I am referencing a theopoetic image and symbol of characteristics and experiences that emulate purity and are a series of embodied privileges justified by synthetic ideas & beliefs. White Bodies have access to authority and power that allows them to establish and dictate the normative criteria for all other bodies considered non-White people in society.

[4] Restore us, God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved. You transplanted a vine from Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. Its branches reached as far as the Sea, and its shoots as far as the river. Why have you broken down its walls so that all who pass by pick its grapes? Boars from the forest ravage it, and insects from the fields feed on it. Return to us, God Almighty! Look down from heaven and see! Watch over this vine, the root your right hand has planted, the son you have raised up for yourself. Your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire; at your rebuke, your people perish. Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself. Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name. Restore us, Lord God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved (Psalm 80: 7-19 NIV).

- Planted people pray to be rooted into the place of God.
- Planted people need to be rested on by God.
- Planted people pray to be restored by the One who planted them.

While driving to brunch, I noticed that a police car was following my vehicle very closely. After about five minutes of following directly behind me, a White police officer pulled me over. Already aware of the rules, I immediately lowered the front windows, and put my hands on the steering wheel, so that he could see that I was in no way a threat. The White officer walked up to the car on the passenger side, and fiercely knocked with his nightstick on my daughter's window, which I had not yet opened. I instantly rolled down her window to reveal a sleeping six-year-old. His reaction was one of astonishment. Next, he came to the front window and looked at me. He saw a Body who did not dress for himself that day. This attire that I wore seemed to be something suitable, centered on a White police officer's pragmatic view of what a Black Body coming from a Black Church should look like. I wore a t-shirt, a pair of chinos, and a cross dangling from my neck; the choice of my clothes was not of my own volition. I put on my chinos because I just did not want to be so informal in church that Sunday. I chose a salmon-colored t-shirt because my partner had told me that she likes the color combination of salmon and blue on my skin tone; the shirt read "Be Human" referencing Psalm 139.[5] Although I rarely wear jewelry, for reasons unknown to me, on that day I decided to wear my cross. I had kept the cross hidden under my shirt because I had put it on just for me; no one else needed to know that I was wearing it. However, a theological action which changes everything, before leaving church

[5] I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well (Psalm 139:14 NRSV).

to have brunch with my Pastor and friends, my daughter pulled the cross out of my shirt saying that everyone needed to see my pretty cross. I listened to her.

As the White police officer looked me up and down, I spoke: “May I please ask what you’re stopping me for?” He responded that he was not allowed to answer me until I had first given him my license and registration. I complied, and he then basically told me that he was just making sure that everything was legitimate with the car. Next, he proceeded to ask me, “What was I, a stranger, doing in his neighborhood? Why did I go to church so far from my home when clearly the license I am looking at says you live over thirty miles away?” I heeded to his authority, answered all his questions, and gave him what he demanded. He then told me that he stopped me because he could not clearly see my license plate’s expiration date and he walked back to his car with my information in hand. The police officer kept me and my sleeping daughter waiting for about 30 minutes. When he finally returned, the White police officer told me that everything was validated but now I needed to prove the car was insured. Even though his computer showed that the car was indeed insured, there seemed to be an asterisk that stated, “read sidenote.” When I presented him the insurance papers, he took another 15 minutes to substantiate them. When he reappeared once again, the White police officer told me that I was now acceptable, and he allowed me and my child to leave but I was to remember that “there is nothing that I could change that would stop me from getting pulled over by the police again in that vehicle.” I spoke to him with respect and told him to be safe; I had passed the empirical test, and shooed off as if I embodied this empirical imagination, but it was a mere figment of who I truly am.

Echoes of Ancestors

As experienced in my need to be acceptable to the AmeriKan[6] colonial gaze, the world is steeped upon the foundation of colonialism. Within the AmeriKas and the Caribbean, the Black Church roots continue from the indigenous practices that were carried into the AmeriKas through the memories and Bodies of the enslaved. Analogously, the Black Church was also birthed out of an imperialist expansionist colonial womb. This evocative phrase encapsulates the complex and often painful genesis of the Black Church in the United States. Borne out of the brutal realities of chattel slavery, where Africans were ripped from their ancestral lands, commodified, and subjected to the imposition of European religious and cultural frameworks, the Black Church emerged as a space of spiritual resilience and covert resistance. Despite being forced to navigate the hypocrisy of dual sermons and coded hymns to circumvent white masters' scrutiny, enslaved Black Bodies found solace and a sense of human agency within their own communal religious practices. Even the sanitized "Slave Bible," with its deliberate omissions of liberation narratives, could not fully extinguish the yearning for freedom that resonated within the Black Christian community. Thus, the Black Church can be understood as a complex product of dehumanization and defiance, a "womb" forged in the furnace of oppression yet giving birth to vibrant traditions of faith, identity, and ongoing struggles for liberation. As those who are called out to be followers of God in the AmeriKas, the Black Church, be it led by a male, a female, or a person

[6] Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, "Amerika Definition & Meaning," Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster, 2019), https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Amerika. I have used this alternative spelling referencing specifically the United States of America as an intent to portray the country's racist, fascist, and oppressive stance which the country holds for those other than the landowning white man, as originally proposed by the founding fathers showing how culturally inferior the USA truly is.

who is gender non-conforming "was never trained" [7] to be astute in biblical scholarship; they were trained in the in biblical scholarship of the Puritan White male theological thought – synthetic faith.[8] Accordingly, it is my estimate that believers were, and still are, taught more about the way of Whiteness than the way of Yeshua.[9] Ironically, while much of the Bible and Qur'an were conceived as a means of resisting empire, religious texts have been used by many colonial powers to undergird their imperial designs. There from, the experience of the Black Church and Black Bodies legacy of colonial heritage exist a sizable range of areas where the Black Church needs to be decolonized. Through its movement out of the birth canal of colonialism, the Black Church has been stolen from the original setting of the earliest members of the ekklēsia.[10]

As one birthed into the Black Church and theologically groomed to be an Afro-Caribbean-American Minister of agapē love, I have felt and pondered on the weight of the colonized Black Church since my youth. I deliberated and scrutinized how others and I experience as one disassociated and othered within the ekklēsia, in the embodiment of the Black

[7] Christena Cleveland, *God Is a Black Woman* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2022).

[8] Peter B. Clarke and Peter Byrne, *Religion Defined and Explained* (New York, NY: MacMillan Press, 1998); Avi Astor and Damon Mayrl, "Culturalized Religion: A Synthetic Review and Agenda for Research," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 59, no. 2 (April 29, 2020): 209–26, https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12661. For this dissertation, I will be defining synthetic faith as a term used to describe faith systems shaped and molded by external forces, often within contexts of domination or colonization. It signifies the complex intermingling of imposed religious structures, beliefs, and practices with pre-existing cultural and spiritual traditions, resulting in a unique but hybridized form of faith.

[9] Cleveland, *God Is a Black Woman*, 2022.

[10] Ralph J. Korner, *The Origin and Meaning of Ekklēsia in the Early Jesus Movement* (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2017), 1-2, 46, 51, 57. The Greek word ekklēsia is often translated into the modern word Church. Its meaning in the ancient world was simply assembly. The term ekklēsia used by the followers within the first century Jesus Movement displays both continuity and discontinuity with the earlier Greek and Jewish sources, Jews ethnically and to the behavior generally associated with the way that Jews live. In many respects, in the ancient world, politics and religion were integral parts of the same cultural whole, whereby religious representation and terminology in political decrees abounded from classical Athens until the end of the Imperial period. When simplified, the word ekklēsia came simply to indicate the name of a meeting.

Body, causing a disconnection from our divine wholeness due to colonialism.[11] I have been having conversations about the colonization of the Church for many years, I always thought it of great significance to consider how a decolonized Black Church[12] may engage and *commune* with its community by *returning* to the example of the non-colonized[13] and reconciliatory faith system, by shedding the aspects of colonial *education, racism,* and *capitalism* in how we understand Yeshua of Yehoshua: Christ and sacred texts.[14]

[11] Erin Blakemore, "Colonialism Facts and Information," National Geographic: Culture (National Geographic, May 3, 2021), https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/colonialism. Colonialism is defined as control by one controlling entity over a dependent area or people. An example of colonialism can be found when one sovereign nation subjugates another, extending their borders into both contiguous and noncontiguous areas while conquering and exploiting the subjugated population to increase their own power justifying their conquests by asserting their legal and religious obligation to take over the land and culture of the "Black" indigenous Bodies.

[12] Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E.* (London, UK: SCM Press, 1979); Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood, eds., *Controversies in Body Theology* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2008), 159-160. Israel - a community of oppressed multi-ethnic Bodies - was first subjugated, indoctrinated, and exploited by Egypt nearly forty-six hundred years ago to expropriate the building of the pyramids. Another example can be observed starting approximately in the third century BC, during the period when Jews were governed by Rome through House Codes - a rule that delineated what Oppressed Bodies looked like, where they lived, their theological beliefs, and their overall value, their local economy, and usage of women and slaves. A third example can be found nearly five hundred years ago when the French conquered the indigenous people of Ay-ti. After being bound into chattel slavery, Black Bodies began to revolt out of a Spirit of liberation, which subsequently gave rise to the Haitian Revolution: a united effort of Black Bodies - a community - decolonizing themselves. The final example is found in AmeriKa, a people which has and continues to use religion to manipulate as well as suppress the Oppressed from identifying and revealing their personal divine Body by keeping their theological imagination in the same box that the proleptically Puritan Christians built.

[13] In all actuality, historically, we have never had an example of non-colonized faith because the introduction of religious faith is always built on colonization. However, we do have an example in the lived life of Yeshua, of the attempt to decolonize faith and theology, embodied in a theology of the underside which contains only the hope of decolonization. Yeshua experienced and shared the example living into an image and imitation of decolonization, in his incessant discord with those who uphold the Royal Theological Imagination.

[14] Joan E Taylor, *What Did Jesus Look Like?* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2018); Leonard J Swidler, *Yeshua : A Model for Moderns* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1993); James W. Fleming, *The Jewish Background of Jesus*, (LaGrange, GA: Biblical Resources, 2004), 11. It is essential to understand that the historical Palestinian Jewish Yeshua of Yehoshua (Jesus Christ) was an Afro-Asiatic man described by the ancient historian Herodotus as resembling, the Egyptians, and the Ethiopians having a broad nose, thick lips, woolly hair, and burnt of skin. Likewise, it is impossible for Yeshua to be understood outside of the sense of community which reveals him as a poor - Gentile because of some of how he did not keep to Jewish customs - Jewish member of a minority group amid a larger dominant and controlling group of the Greco-Roman world, and son of a *tekton* (a stonemason by trade).

Continuous Cycles of Investigation: Unravelling Colonialism's Layers

As I read the Holy Bible, particularly the descriptions of how Yeshua lived his life, I can clearly see the stature and predicament of the Black Church today; one gorged and satiated in colonialism.[15] One field in which the Black Church can be like Yeshua is in their embodiment of the statutes of scripture which emphasize communal human relationships. When living out a life of ritual and moral holiness, Yeshua followed the command to "love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18b NRSV)," and went on to give a new commandment that identifies a believer as a member of The Body of God:[16] "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. (John 13:34b NRSV)," leading to freedom amid colonialism. It is my estimate that much of the Black Church of today, has moved away from both the visual and auditory experiences molded into the original ekklēsia by the adept and extemporizing hands of the master potter Yeshua of Yehoshua. For whenever the vessel of the Ekklēsia was marred by sin, Yeshua, grasping them in the potter's hands, was able to infuse living water (John 4:10-14 NRSV, Revelation 21:6 MSG), reshaping and remolding the Ekklēsia towards following him in agapē[17] love by living into the

[15] Joan E. Taylor, *What Did Jesus Look Like* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2018).

[16] Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993). In her book "The Body of God," Sallie McFague conceptualizes the cosmos as a metaphor for the divine, representing the embodiment of God. While I am familiar with McFague's concept, my own understanding, shaped by Liberation and Process theology, predates my encounter with her work. It is from these foundational perspectives that I developed a more inclusive comprehension of belonging to the Body of Christ. The term "Body of Christ" initially evoked a sense of exclusivity, suggesting that individuals outside the Christian faith were excluded from this sacred entity. However, grounding my perspective on the belief that all humanity reflects the image and likeness of God, I perceive us all as integral members of the Body of God.

[17] Mark Dimmock and Andrew Fisher, "Fletcher's Situation Ethics." In *Ethics for A-Level*, 1st ed., 79–90. Open Book Publishers, 2017. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1wc7r6j.9; Elaine Padilla, *Divine Enjoyment: A Theology of Passion and Exuberance* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2014), 45, 48, 51. Agapē, a boundless and selfless love, stands alone as the ultimate law. All other laws serve as guideposts, leading us toward this pinnacle of love. Agapē flows freely and generously, both upwards and downwards, in a continuous cycle of giving and receiving. Its aim is to glimpse the divine beauty and nurture the divine spark within each soul, ultimately seeking the eternal good of both the individual and the collective "Body of God." This path of love and kindness, like Yeshua's act of infusing living water, seeks to heal and reshape the Ekklēsia, guiding it towards living as an embodiment of the divine image ("imago Dei") and following in God's footsteps ("imitatio Dei").

imago Dei and *imitatio Dei* (Philippians 2:3-8, Joshua 18: 1-12 NRSV).[18] Today, many of those who are members of the Body of God have been unable to fully live into themselves as the *imago Dei* and *imitatio Dei* and the *imago Christi* and *imitatio Christi*.[19] Consequently, these members perceive themselves as marginalized within the Body of God due to the absence of agapē love within the Church, as prescribed by Yeshua. These disassociated bodies have either been forced to or inspired by the Spirit to separate from the Church because of its colonial beliefs and practices that perpetuate violence against Black Bodies or called to bring about an incontrovertible shift within the Black Church. It is a shift akin to Yeshua's challenging the Body of God of His time to integrate agapē love into the human community.

Yeshua – as a dissociated member of the Hebraic community due to His strong beliefs in liberating everybody in a fascist law-abiding system of control – started an act of Sankofa:[20] going back to retrieve something from His relative past to create a relatively better future. This dissociation with a law-abiding community is a first century act of decolonizing faith, religion,

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[18] PBS. "Glossary Definition: Imago Dei ('Image of God')." PBS. Public Broadcasting Service, 2022. https://www.pbs.org/faithandreason/theogloss/imago-body.html. Inspired by Latin Theologians, the term *imago Dei* refers most fundamentally to two things: first, God's own self-actualization through humankind; and second, God's care for humankind. To say that humans are in the image of God is to recognize the special qualities of human nature which allow God to be made manifest in humans. In other words, for humans to have the conscious recognition of their being in the image of God means that they are the creature through whom God's plans and purposes can be made known and actualized; humans, in this way, can be seen as co-creators with God.

[19] Ryan S. Peterson, *The Imago Dei as Human Identity: A Theological Interpretation* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2016), 1. *ProQuest eBook Central*, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=6488556. Created from dtl on 2022-04-28 16:09:43. The call to be in the image and imitation of Yeshua, is similar to that which calls the Body of God to imitate God. We are like God in the sense that we are like the human Yeshua of Yehoshua, whose person and actions are identified with the person and actions of God. Jesus Christ, being fully divine and fully human, is God's image in the world, revealing the identity and character of God. Rather than bringing a new intention into existence, Yeshua brings to fruition God's permanent intention for humanity and establishes the conditions for others to join him in the fulfillment of their human identity.

[20] The Spirituals Project at the University of Denver, "African Tradition, Proverbs, and Sankofa," Sweet Chariot: The story of the spirituals, February 13, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20110420131901/http://ctl.du.edu/spirituals/literature/sankofa.cfm. Sankofa – were fi na wosan kofa a yenki – is an Asante proverb, which translates to "it is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot." It is symbolized by a mythical bird with its feet facing forward and its head turned backward, carrying an egg in its mouth. Sankofa represents the idea of learning from the past, reclaiming lost knowledge, and applying it to build a better future.

and God. As members in the Body of God who are made in the image and imitation of the Divine, we are a paradigm for all of humanity to follow as Yeshua pointed out in his prescriptatory words: "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Ancestor (John 14:12 NRSV)."[21] "The Father's king-om is within you and it is outside you. When you know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will understand that you are children of the living Father (Gospel of Thomas 1:2-3)." The Body of God is called to move and work ministerially as one whole body: a community.

Prophetic Imagination in Action: From Hidden Chants to Public Uprisings

The genesis of the Black Church started when the Neo-Assyrian Empire (2 Kings 16-19; Daniel 4; Jonah 3; Isaiah 36-37) decided to conquer, enslave and exploit other people for personal benefit and a community emerged out of an act of theological imagination inspired by the Spirit of liberation.[22] The Black Church as we know it today did not start until after over ten million African people were stolen from their homes and 388,000 of the abducted people were shipped through "*The Middle Passage*" and brought to the early beginnings of AmeriKa for the sole purpose of profit: a God ordained chattel slavery.[23] As these enslaved Black Bodies were

[21] Bible Hub, "Strong's Greek: 3962. Πατήρ (patér) -- A father, 2022, https://biblehub.com/greek/3962.htm. The word used for Heavenly Father, Πατέρα (patér), can also be translated as ancestor and elder.

[22] Robin Ngo, "10 Things to Know about the Assyrian Empire," Biblical Archaeology Society, May 31, 2019, https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/ancient-cultures/ancient-near-eastern-world/10-things-to-know-about-the-assyrian-empire/.

[23] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "How Many Slaves Landed in the U.S.?" PBS (Public Broadcasting Service, September 19, 2013), https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/how-many-slaves-landed-in-the-us/. The Middle Passage represents the beginning of race-based bondage when millions of enslaved Africans were forcibly transported from their indigenous homes to the AmeriKa's as slaves who were the only remedy for the economic-dessert that plagued the embedded capitalistic systematization of those of the Royal Imagination.

stolen and thrown into a manufactured New World, one of their first initiations amongst the indigenous bodies already present in the land was the concept of indentured servanthood already practiced by the heterochthonous Puritan colonists – the new Israel in the new Jerusalem experiencing a new heaven and a new earth.[24] Indentured servanthood was at first a means by which those who were incarcerated or fiscally challenged were given the opportunity to obtain freedom and liberation, as these *servants* paid off their debts through free physical and intellectual labor after being sold to pecunious families. During the earliest portion of American colonialism, servanthood was not predicated by the copiousness or scarcity of melanin in one's skin. Servants whether Black or White[25] worked and lived together. [26] Equivalently, masters Black and White owned servants. But there was a shift in the Master/Servant and Black/White dynamics in 1660, as the colonial (*racial*) imagination[27] of White indentured servants caused

[24] Dwight N. Hopkins, *Down, Up, and Over: Slave Religion and Black Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 13.

[25] As established earlier in this dissertation, a "White Body" signifies an individual operating within a colonial mindset and actively upholding its structures and ideologies. It is not simply synonymous with Caucasian ethnicity.

[26] Edmund Sears Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003); Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 2004; Cone, *Black Theology and Black*, 1989; Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study, With a New Preface* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018). In 1688, there were 668 white indentured servants and only 297 individuals classified as Black, comprising servants, slaves, and those who were free. This demographic snapshot underscores instances where both Black and White individuals participated in the ownership of slaves, illuminating the complex social and economic dynamics of slave societies. It was not until the early eighteenth century that the population of blacks outnumbered whites. Although both Black and White individuals initially arrived in the colonies as indentured servants, a crucial distinction emerged. Unlike their white counterparts, Black Bodies were systematically denied opportunities and gradually relegated to a permanent underclass of slaves, largely due to entrenched racial prejudices. Early English colonists, wary of potential slave rebellions based on past experiences with uprisings among white indentured servants, perpetuated these prejudices, leading to the establishment and perpetuation of a system of permanent black slavery, alongside the subjugation of Indigenous Bodies.

[27] Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2001. For this dissertation, I am defining the colonial imagination as one opposed to the prophetic imagination. Walter Brueggemann defines the prophetic imagination as a transformative way of seeing and engaging with the world that challenges the status quo and envisions alternative possibilities for justice, liberation, and wholeness. Rooted in the biblical tradition, the prophetic imagination, disrupts dominant narratives of oppression and exploitation, offering visions of a future characterized by equity, peace, and flourishing for all. The colonial imagination is a complex web of beliefs, justifications, and narratives used by colonizers to perceive, control, and exploit colonized people and lands. It reinforces power imbalances, silences voices, and limits possibilities for liberation, contrasting with the hopeful or prophetic imagination that seeks transformation and justice.

them to break the covenant of servanthood. Whites realized the privilege of racism within the capitalistic foothold of the Puritan faith belief. As the White indentured servants fled from servanthood, it became extremely laborious to locate and repossess indentured White servants due to the forthcoming privilege of Whiteness - that of White supremacy creating, White Bodies, not the other way around.[28] Coincidentally, when Black indentured servants fled from the oppression of servanthood, it was relatively effortless to capture and repossess Black servants due to the foreshadowed encumbrance of Blackness. Subsequently, the early Puritan Church capitalistic imagination caused them to claim that God had already willed and perpetuated the right for one Body to act in governance over other Bodies. Thus, in the late seventeenth century, a governance of White Bodies over Black Bodies was evoked; propagating that only dark indentured servants would be used in chattel slavery. As the enslavement of Black Bodies were a highly profitable fixture in the economy of early Amerika, the Puritans invested heavily and brutally in the process of ministering through chattel slavery.[29] With the White propagation that however cruel chattel slavery might be, the African slave in AmeriKa was happier embracing free intellectual and physical labor than enjoying a pre-colonized life. As a result of the White hunt of the Black Body, Black Bodies of Africa had to supply slaves or be slaves themselves as violence, ferocity, and the intolerable survival pressure was applied by this Puritan ministry of a God ordained servanthood.[30] As those forced to engender and effectuate free intellectual and physical labor – enslavement – privileged Slave Owners sought and tested for strong,

[28] Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 48.

[29] Urbana Missions, "The U.S. Racial Crisis and World Evangelism: Tom Skinner Speech," YouTube, January 29, 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvKQx4ycTmA (Accessed April 28, 2019).

[30] Cyril L. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1963), 7.

imaginative, and erudite Bodies by placing these Black Bodies in dens of purification.[31] In their search for the perfect oppressed Body, slave owners:

> examined them for defects, looked at the teeth, pinched the skin, sometimes tasted the perspiration to see if the slaves' blood was pure and his health as good as his appearance. Some of the women affected a curiosity, the indulgence of which, with a horse, would have caused them to be kicked 20 yards across the deck. But the slave had to stand it. Then *in order to restore the dignity which have been lost by too intimate an examination, the purchaser spat in the face of the slave*. Having become the property of his owner, he was branded on both sides of the breast with hot iron. His duties were explained to him by an interpreter, and *a priest instructed him in the first principles of Christianity.*[32]

In their attempt to keep the Black Body under perpetual servitude, Whites borrowed a well-known breaking strategy to break the Blacks unceasingly.

> I have a foolproof method of controlling your black slaves, if installed correctly, it will control the slaves for at least three hundred years. I use fear, distrust, and envy for control purposes. Let us make a slave. What do we need? First of all, we need a black nigger man, a pregnant nigger woman, and her baby nigger boy. Second, we will use the same basic principle that we use in breaking a horse, combined with some more sustaining factors. We reduce them from their natural state in nature; whereas nature provides them with the natural capacity to take care of their needs and the needs of their offspring, we break that natural string of independence from them and thereby create a dependency state so that we may be able to get from them useful production for our business and pleasure. Pay little attention to the generation of original breaking but concentrate on future generations. We must completely annihilate the mother tongue of the nigger and institute a new language [because language] leads the heart of the people.[33]

Upon arriving enslaved and purchased by citizens of the thirteen colonies, the process of *Christianization* of the Body took on a multipronged approach. The Black Body after being tested for their strength and prowess before purchase, was then broken through the propagandization and indoctrination of sexual humility – "Breaking the Buck." Both male and

[31] James, *The Black Jacobins*, 7; Herbert S. Klein and Ben Vinson, III. *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3, 12-15.

[32] James, *The Black Jacobins*, 7-8. emphasis added.

[33] William Lynch, *The Willie Lynch Letter and the Making of a Slave* (Long Island City, NY: African Tree Press, 2017), 6-7, 10, 14, 25.

female slaves were publicly dehumanized when the slave owners and their hired help raped and sodomized Black bodies daily as a means of both instilling fear and maiming the human Spirit that naturally resists: an attempt to separate the divine Body from the ancestors. Additionally, the Puritans developed and spoon-fed Blacks a theology tailored to manipulate and reform their pre-existing ethics and morals. Thus, the "Slave Bible" was created to indoctrinate the enslaved person by persuading them to believe that the God we come from desired and commanded the "Slave" to obey and respect these "God ordained" masters who have been chosen to lord power over those who cannot "reason"[34] for themselves by a Puritan LORD or modern Israelite. As the enslavement of Black Bodies was not designed to be a temporary solution to a capitalistic enigma, it was crucial to *breed* the next generation of free laboring slaves as a less defiant and imaginative slave; one who was solely concerned with increasing their productivity by the self-exploitation of their own Body for the master.[35]

Consequently, the elemental religious belief and imperialist thought patterns of the slave master infiltrated the Black community during slavery. Notwithstanding, even with a lack of access to most portions of the King James Version of the Bible that was thought to promote freedom and liberation, descendants of the enslaved were able to tap into their theological imagination – as we can only believe what we can imagine[36] – and actively catechize and resuscitate the retained faith in the divine within themselves which overcame the oppression found in the Slave Bible. Thus, enabling the procurement of a reconnection with the spiritual

[34] Jacqueline Stodnick and Renée Trilling, eds., *Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Studies* (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2012).

[35] Eric Eustace Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

[36] Michel Martin, "Slave Bible from the 1800s Omitted Key Passages That Could Incite Rebellion," NPR (NPR, December 9, 2018), https://www.npr.org/2018/12/09/674995075/slave-bible-from-the-1800s-omitted-key-passages-that-could-incite-rebellion; Cleveland, *God Is a Black Woman*, 2022). In the Slave Bible, about 90 percent of the Old Testament is missing and 50 percent of the New Testament is missing.

connection of liberation found within their inner *Self*.[37] Despite living in an oppressed and dehumanized divine Black Body only presented with a cruel despotic white male God, the Enslaved Bodies imagination evoked an ever-evolving religious tradition which demonstrates:[38]

- A liberative God who wrestled with the oppressive socioeconomic and political systems of the White Body.
- Aesthetic and ritual dimensions of religion that were liberative in spiritual terms.
- Religious thought as liberational in theological terms.
- An agapē thy neighbor aspect of community.

I believe that the verse found in the Slave Bible used by the Puritan's connected the enslaved to the divine within - the *imago Dei*, *imago Yeshua* and *imago Sophia*:[39]

> The Spirit of the LORD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to *them that are bound*; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified (Isaiah 61:1-3 The Negro Bible).

In embodying The Holy Spirit, the enslaved Black Bodies moved like the divine feminine always working for the benefit of others regardless of the large number of redactions and edits to the biblical texts reflecting a White male symbol of power chosen by God. The embodiment of Sophia is a manifestation exhibiting that the Spirit cannot be enslaved by one's intentional plan to withhold liberative information from Black Bodies. Further, the embodiment of Sophia gave

[37] C. Michael Smith, *Jung and Shamanism in Dialogue: Retrieving the Soul, Retrieving the Sacred* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2007), 120. According to analytical psychologist Carl Jung, the Self signifies the unification and centralization of consciousness and unconsciousness in a person.

[38] Anthony B. Pinn, *Terror and Triumph: The Nature of Black Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 82-83.

[39] The imitation of Sophia parallels the imitation of God and the imitation of Yeshua.

Black Bodies the wisdom needed to deconstruct their given racist Puritan Theology leading us to the scales of injustice falling from our eyes by which we receive liberative sight forthwith.

This was demonstrated at the first landing site of the enslaved in Ay-ti (Haiti), as the Spanish and French colonizers enslaved indigenous Bodies in the image of the third-century theologian Saint Thomas Aquinas who believed that "men of outstanding intelligence naturally take command, while those who are less intelligent but of more robust physique, seem intended by nature to act as servants."[40] Despite proselytization endured by the Enslaved Body - these broken and battered Bodies who despite divisions in language and history share a common culture and destiny – became aware of themselves as a people with divinely given right of total liberation from oppression.[41] This God given breath of liberation, Sankofa, caused the enslaved to feel a consanguinity with the ancestors who had, contrary to the lies spread pertinaciously about Negro docility, started to seek a way back to the holistic self by:[42]

- Revolting at the ports of embarkation.
- Holding hunger strikes on board the ships.
- Undoing their chains in attempts at insurrection.
- Committing mass suicide by throwing themselves overboard, and infanticide.
- Poisoning themselves, masters, and landowners.

[40] Roberta Anderson and Dominic Aidan Bellenger, *Medieval Worlds: A Sourcebook* (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2013) 275.

[41] Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), 15; Joshua Ian Jelly-Schapiro, "The Caribbean in the World: Imaginative Geographies in the Independence Age" Dissertation. University of California, Berkeley, 2011.

[42] Dianne M. Hancke, *Guide to the Names of God* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2014), 52; Jean-Bertrand Aristide, "Umoya Wamagama: The Spirit of the Words" (Thesis, 2006); James, *The Black Jacobins*, 8-9. Ruach Elohim the breath of God.

- Having Negro midwives perform simple operations on newly born children causing these infants to suffer from jaw-sickness and causing the death of nearly one-third of the children born on the plantation.

Furthermore, during their religious services in their shadow life behind master's back, the enslaved community sang hymns[43] of freedom from oppression and vowed to destroy the whites and all that they possessed. It is in this light, that The Haitian Revolution – both a social and economic insurrection – completely changed the course of world history and the relations between all humanity by playing an inordinately important role in the renewed articulation of human rights and social justice, a form of liberation theology that moves from an imageless imagination to the embodiment of a mobile imagination that is radically and abundantly changed.[44] The mobile imagination developed and ameliorated during the Haitian the enslaved community sang hymns[45] of freedom from oppression and vowed to destroy the whites and all that they possessed. Revolution affected the governing and violence towards Black Bodies throughout creation helping the oppressed Bodies in AmeriKa to open their own theological imagination using the heavily redacted Slave Bible along with the spiritual element of connection found in prayer. Dutty Boukman a leader of the Neg Maron, a practicing Muslim, and

[43] Hymns served as a way for the enslaved Black Bodies to express the community's re-imagined decolonized faith, the community's sorrows, while at the same time buoying their hopes. You can find samples of some corn ditties in the appendix.

[44] Gaston Bachelard, *Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Institute Publications, Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1988), 1-2; Stanley J. Grenz, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2015); Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues: Mujerista Theology* (Maryknol, NY: Orbis Books, 2004); James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013). Drawing upon the divine spark of their Imago Dei, marginalized communities wield a "mobile imagination" – a dynamic and embodied capacity to challenge dominant narratives, envision liberation rooted in their lived experiences, and actively participate in constructing a just world. This mobile imagination fuels both spiritual growth and social justice action, embodying the divine call to participate in God's ongoing creation.

[45] Hymns served as a way for the enslaved Black Bodies to express the community's re-imagined decolonized faith, the community's sorrows, while at the same time buoying their hopes. You can find samples of some corn ditties in the appendix.

a Houngan (Vodou Priest) prayed a prayer, in an interfaith meeting, known to be one of the catalysts of the Haitian Revolution:

> The god[46] who created the earth, who created the sun that gives us light. The god who holds up the ocean, who makes the thunder roar. Our god who has ears to hear. You who are hidden in the clouds, who watch us from where you are. You see all that the white has made us suffer. The white man's god asks him to commit crimes. But the god within us wants to do good. Our god, who is so good, so just, He orders us to revenge our wrongs. It's He who will direct our arms and bring us the victory. It's He who will assist us. We all should throw away the image of the white men's god who is so pitiless. Listen to the voice for liberty that speaks in all our hearts.[47]

Boukman's prayer – in a multi-faith service – moved like a Drum Beat flowing through the Bodies of the enslaved connecting the oppressed with the divine within, because the Most Divine was the creator of the music which unites Divine and divine in the vibrations of the talking drum.[48] With an unscaled eye, bent towards the liberation of the Black Body, the Black community of faith, that would be known as the Black Church became a constant source of concern to the colonizers as they feared that the Black Body would rise and no longer be under servitude.

As such, it is from its genesis, that the Black Church found its political and prophetic voice in the struggle for *abolishment*. Black faith leaders took a stand against the oppressive substratum of the colonizers confronting the institution of chattel slavery. In their re-imagining the Royal Imagination into a Prophetic Imagination, the enslaved Bodies engaged in the abolitionist movement, as they sought emancipation, reconstruction, and liberation by

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[46] In my writings I have used "God" or "god" as a way of intentionally proclaiming that while a capitalized "G" similar to an all-caps LORD, is often used as a way to describe the All Mighty in the traditional Abrahamic faiths, the Most Divine has been worshiped and lifted on high since before this tradition came to be as god. This can even be found in the Torah (Old Testament) when Elohim (God) is authenticated as ancient Semitic title, "god," the chief deity of all the other gods - "the god." This is also clearly found in the Biblical reference of "Lord (Genesis 1:1 NRSV)" and "LORD (Genesis 2:4 NRSV)."

[47] Margaret Mitchell Armand, *Healing in the Homeland: Haïtian Vodou Tradition* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013), 57.

[48] Jacob K. Olupona, ed., *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society* (St. Paul, MN: International Religious Foundation, 1991), 84.

dismantling Puritan tenets that violate living into the *imago Dei* and *imitatio Dei*.[49] In practicing their faith, Blacks, as whole members of the Body of God, continue to work as the instrument that will unite the city of God with God. This is due to the *tzelem* (Genesis 1:27 OJB)[50] that God is inside me, inside you, and inside everybody else. Humanity comes into the world with God, we only have to search for it inside of ourselves for complete *gnosis*.[51] "One does not see with the soul or the spirit, but the mind which is between the two sees the vision. We should clothe ourselves with the perfect Human, acquire it for ourselves as he commanded us, and proclaim the good news, not laying down any other rule or other law beyond what the Savior said (Gospel of Mary 10:11-13)."[52] Thus, the Black Church moves closer into sacred wisdom, towards the decolonization of the Black Church in re-imagining the master's tools, by stepping into its prophetic imagination, fully aware that in order to dismantle the system of oppression new tools must be developed – namely the embodiment of agapē love.

[49] Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Ephesians 5:1-2 NRSV).

[50] Bible Hub, "Genesis 1:27 Hebrew." Genesis 1:27 So God created man in His own image, September 2022. https://biblehub.com/genesis/1-27.htm#lexicon. To be the *tzelem* of the supreme God is the for humanity - the Body of God - to be a representative figure characterizing and emanating the likeness of God.

[51] Christoph Markschies, *Gnosis an Introduction*, trans. John Bowden (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2003); Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, "Gnosis Definition & Meaning," Merriam-Webster, 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gnosis; Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Eduardo Mendieta, eds., *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2012). To establish common ground with my readers, I employ the multifaceted richness of "gnosis," drawing upon its original Greek meaning "γνῶσις" as denoting personal, transformative knowledge gained through lived experience. This understanding resonates with the emphasis on praxis and liberation within newer theological frameworks, as exemplified by the work of Isasi-Díaz: Gnosis, in this context, arises from the margins and is not about escaping the world, but about engaging with it critically and creatively, transforming it towards justice and liberation.

[52] Hal Taussig and John Dominic Crossan, *A New New Testament: A Bible for the Twenty-first Century, Combining Traditional and Newly Discovered Texts* (Boston, MA: Mariner Books /Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), 226. The term *tzelem* refers to humanity being made in the image and imitation of "אֱלֹהִים" Elohim.

Building the Bridge: Framing the Dissertation & Mapping Black Church Transformation

In the dissertation entitled "Agapē: Embracing Clean Pain and Reimagining a Reconciliatory Pathway Towards Restoration of Dehumanized Black Bodies and Continued Discourse on the Decolonization of the Black Church," the primary objective is to assess the nature and identity of the Black Church. This doctoral project will commence by utilizing the profile of the Black Body as a fundamental aspect in developing a method for decolonizing the spiritual and social practices of the Black Church. Through an examination of the marginalized and dehumanized Black Body, this project aims to identify the specific areas within the collective Black Body in AmeriKa that have been impacted by colonialism.

Secondly, this thesis project will identify the theological and social belief systems that govern Black Bodies is a crucial area to analyze when decolonizing the Black Church. Finally, this project will aim to identify the capacity for change, which is reliant upon the Black Church as a collective body realizing the foundations were built upon racist Puritan Christian views that support the exploitation of human bodies. Focused on the decolonization of "human relationships" within the Black Church, the singular focus of this thesis will be on how the Body of God can cultivate neighborly relationships based on agapē: a belief that no one wants or chooses to be alienated.

In ascertaining the identity and social belief systems of the Black Church, a systematic approach of investigation that empowers my site team, all project participants, and I to engage in non-exploitative communication[53] that facilitates and bolsters harmonious relationships within

[53] Non-exploitative communication refers to a mode of interaction characterized by ethical and respectful engagement, free from coercion, manipulation, or the exploitation of power differentials. It prioritizes principles of fairness, transparency, and mutual understanding, aiming to foster genuine dialogue and collaboration while upholding the dignity and autonomy of all participants.

the Black Church will be employed. This project aims to anatomize effective solutions to the issues of colonialism that Black Bodies confront every day in the theological and social context of the Black Church by using continuous cycles of investigation designed to reveal effective solutions to the seen and un-seen complexities of proliferated colonialism and colonization experienced by the Body of God within the Black Church.[54] I will be evaluating the changes within myself, my research group, and that of all participants during the course of this thesis project, especially as it relates to the understanding and practice of leadership in the life of the Body of God. I will attempt to evaluate the project's collective process by observing a shift or series of shifts in the demonstration of agapē love as members of the Body of God, a more divine embodiment of the image and imitation of the Most Divine. The image of God can be experienced through the image and imitation of Yeshua (imitatio Christus*)*. Embodying the image and imitation of Yeshua calls us to "clothe ourselves with the perfect Human, acquire it for ourselves as they commanded us, and proclaim the good news (The Gospel of Mary 10:11)."

[54] Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research* Fourth ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2014), 1, 23, 26-27.

Chapter II

YESHUA THE DECOLONIZER OF THE CHURCH

Living in the time and culture of the experience age,[55] humanity must move from a computer-like form of binary thinking: zeros and ones, black and white, the Puritan God and the Black God. Rather, humanity is called to move towards multiplicity and expansiveness: a centralization in the ethic of agapē love as demonstrated by Yeshua (Jesus the Nazarene), a revelation of God on earth made clear in fully human form. My definition of agapē love can be found in the parable of the befitting yoke. As I have reimagined and will be using throughout this thesis, agapē is a type of embodied love that is present in the essence of creation. It is the birthing sound[56] of which love is the essence of life. A phenomenon of love that when in pain, brings you healing. A phenomenon of love that transcends our linear and binary understanding of time; a circular phenomenon of experiencing past, present, and future all at once to create self-liberation. It is a love that uplifts the human experience in an attempt to bring it into wholeness. I do not believe that humans, and therefore God and theology, can be seen in a binary way, for the liberation of the Body can never be binary. As I cannot fully express this multiplicity of spiritual inclusiveness – moving from the binary – solely in pros, I will be writing from a theopoetic purview in an attempt to express a renewed and re-imagined non-binary theology – liberation

[55] Sharon Bennett, "The Experience Age Has Arrived," Business Analyst Articles, Webinars, Templates, Jobs (Macgregor Communications, February 21, 2019), https://www.batimes.com/articles/the-experience-age-has-arrived/. The modern era in which humanity's locus is a connected camera televising our life in the moment has increased, but where a digital profile (for example, a Facebook profile and passive feedback) is no longer the center of the social universe. Now at the forefront of the social universe, individuals experience continual self-expression (creating an experience) where the dominant feedback is attention.

[56] There are certain elemental sounds that are present in all human languages, and when played on an instrument like the piano are all in the same key. An example of this can be found in the way a baby or child calls their parents: Mama or Papa.

theology.[57] Much of my theopoetic assertions within the thesis will be anchored in the liberationist movements of scholars in the niche of Liberation Theologies, Process Thought, and Reframed Theologies (the Mystics).

Figure 1: The Early Black Church

Liberation Theology Thinkers

James Hal Cone, considered the founder of Black Liberation Theology, launched a profound and radical challenge to the dominant white theological paradigm and ignited a radical

[57] Lilian Calles Barger, *The World Come of Age: An Intellectual History of Liberation Theology* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 13-14; Liberation theologies are a social and political movement within the "church" where the Most Divine's dwelling has shifted through the connection to the global struggle for experiences of oppressed for freedom confronting two seemingly irreconcilable truths: the biblical promise of freedom and equality and the reality of political bondage because scripture is now interpreted through the plight of the oppressed. These theologies (Black, Ecojustice, Feminist, Latinx, LGBTQIA+, Mujerista, Native American, Queer, Womanist) are the steppingstone allowing for humanity - and for this thesis, the Black Church - to start to decolonize themselves and step into the fullness of their whole Self.

spiritual discourse with his book *Black Theology and Black Power*. In a Puritan, white-dominated[58] society characterized by Christo-fascism, where Black Bodies[59] are consciously and unconsciously systematically dehumanized, Cone strived to render the Gospel[60] relevant to the lives and struggles of Black Bodies. His objective was twofold: to facilitate Black individuals in learning to love themselves by recognizing the divinity within their own bodies. Cone consistently reaffirmed a core tenet in subsequent works that God stands unwaveringly with the oppressed, emphasizing that any message contradicting the liberation of the poor cannot be considered authentically aligned with Yeshua's message.[61]

For Cone, "God's revelation inherently implies liberation – nothing more, nothing less."[62] He grounded this principle in the inherent connection between revelation, history, and faith within the Bible. The God revealed in scripture actively intervenes in human history, aligning with the weak and marginalized. The liberation of the Black community, therefore, embodies God's liberation. This assertion stems from the portrayal of God in Yeshua as a deity whose righteousness is inherently linked with the weak and marginalized in society.[63]

Plausibly, it is crucial not to misconstrue the Bible as an infallible witness. God did not pen the Bible, nor were its writers' mere scribes. Attempts to establish verbal inspiration of scripture stem from a failure to grasp the true essence of the biblical message: human liberation!

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[58] Please reference the definition of "White" in Chapter 1, citation number 3.

[59] Please reference the definition of "Black" in Chapter 1, citation number 1; Resmaa Menakem, Somatic Abolitionism, Lecture presented at the Omega Institute for Holistic Studies, October 2022. When considering the meaning of the words Body and Bodies, it is important to discern and recognize that the term Bodies has nothing to do with identity, nationality, or ethnicity. Bodies literally means that we live in a structure that is predicated on pigmentality. A structure which determines who is human or who is not based on pigment. White Bodies have deemed themselves as the Supreme structure by which everything else will be judged.

[60] N. Clayton Croy, *A Primer of Biblical Greek* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 116. εὐαγγελίζω, to pronounce the good message or glad tidings.

[61] James Hal Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 33, 46, 48.

[62] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 2010.

[63] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 2010.

Unfortunately, an emphasis on verbal infallibility often leads to trivial preoccupations. While churches debate the narrative of whether a whale swallowed Jonah, oppressive laws are enacted by the state against marginalized groups. For the oppressed, the authorship of scripture holds little significance; what matters is whether it can serve as a tool in their struggle against oppressors.

Gustavo Gutiérrez, the pioneer of Latinx Liberation Theology, amalgamates theology with social activism, advocating for believers to engage in civic and political spheres to support the oppressed and advance social justice.[64] He condemns injustice as a means of disavowing the use of Christianity to justify the existing social order. This stance inevitably places the Church in conflict with the powerful. Gutiérrez further contends that the separation of Church and state is imperative for liberating the Church from temporal entanglements and its association with the powerful. This separation enables the Church to assert its autonomy and s without compromise speak out against injustices, relying more on divine strength than on earthly power.[65]

However, Gutiérrez emphasizes that simply denouncing injustice is insufficient. True commitment to liberation requires genuine "friendship with the poor," characterized by shared experiences and solidarity, as genuine love can only exist among equals. Thus, theologically, he rejects the notion of two separate realms – sacred and profane – asserting instead that all of human history is ultimately Christo-finalized.[66] Gutiérrez emphasizes the sacred nature of human

[64] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973).

[65] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Essential Writings* Edited by James B. Nickoloff, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996).

[66] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 1973. The term "Christo-finalized" conveys the notion that all of human history attains its ultimate fulfillment or purpose in Christ. For Gutiérrez, this term embodies the belief that Christ represents the ultimate fulfillment of humanity's quest for salvation and redemption, emphasizing the transformative influence of Christ's message and mission. This message advocates for the liberation of the oppressed and the creation of a fair and compassionate society.

relationships, particularly with regard to our neighbors. He considers the neighbor as a privileged manifestation of God, urging individuals to actively seek out and approach those in need, thereby embracing the sacrament of our neighborhood. "Our neighbor! The sacrament of our neighbor! The neighbor is not he whom I find in my path, but rather he in whose path I place myself, he whom I approach and actively seek."[67]

Walter Brueggemann, renowned for his integration of literary and sociological approaches to biblical interpretation, is particularly celebrated for his role as an exegete and theologian, championing the utilization of the Prophetic Imagination.[68] in dismantling dominant narratives and cultivating alternative visions. He emphasizes the prophetic ministry's responsibility to nurture a critical consciousness that challenges the prevailing cultural mindset. According to Brueggemann, prophets are tasked with nurturing an imaginative vision of the future, independent of immediate feasibility considerations. He contends that while contemporary culture excels in implementation, it often lacks the capacity for imaginative foresight, hindered by a royal consciousness that perceives imagination as a threat.

Central to my engagement with Brueggemann's thought, especially when read alongside Whitehead's process theology, is the concept of the "royal consciousness." However, I have chosen to reframe it as the "royal imagination"[69] to foreground its pervasive influence on contemporary culture. This reframing, informed by my dialogue with both theologians, illuminates how the royal imagination operates beyond conscious control, subtly limiting the

[67] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 1973.

[68] Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001). Brueggemann is known for writing several biblical and preaching commentaries as well as developing Old Testament theological methods consisting of literary mode, social function, and dialectical approach. In his key work, *The Prophetic Imagination*, the concept can be understood as a multi-faceted process involving critical awareness, alternative vision, narrative construction, lived embodiment, and ongoing engagement with reality.

[69] Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 1925; Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2001.

self's potential through its deeply ingrained assumptions and structures. Brueggemann argues that the royal imagination represents a dominant societal mindset fixated on power, control, and rigid adherence to established norms. His insightful observation exposes the inherent tension between conformity and creativity:

> The prophet engages in futuring fantasy. The prophet does not ask if the vision can be implemented, for questions of implementation are of no consequence until the vision can be imagined. The imagination must come before the implementation. The very same royal imagination that fosters the implementation of anything and everything is the one that shrinks imagination because imagination is a danger[70]

This entrenched mindset prioritizes preserving the status quo and bolstering the interests of authority figures. Furthermore, the royal imagination operates by co-opting and commodifying spirituality, transforming it into a tool for maintaining social order and solidifying existing power dynamics. This instrumentalization of religion perpetuates the very societal imbalances it should challenge, instead of serving as a force for justice and equality. Brueggemann's critique compels us to critically examine the diverse ways in which the royal imagination infiltrates seemingly disparate spheres, ultimately stifling the transformative potential of the prophetic impulse. Therefore, it is the prophet's duty to perpetuate the ministry of imagination, continuously conjuring and presenting alternative futures that challenge the singular narrative promoted by dominant powers.[71]

Brueggemann extends his critique of the royal imagination to the context of the Black Church, likening its alignment with Pharaoh's oppressive regime to the conformist tendencies of the Puritan AmeriKan Church.[72] Yet, Brueggemann throughout history, the role of Pharaoh has

[70] Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2001.

[71] Walter Brueggemann, *Delivered into Covenant Pivotal Moments in the Book of Exodus, Part Two* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 9-10; Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2001.

[72] George McKenna, *The Puritan Origins of American Patriotism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007); Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 2003. During a conversation with a fellow student regarding the complicity of certain church factions in perpetuating the royal consciousness, we coined the term "Puritan

been recurrently enacted, symbolizing coercive economic structures that exploit vulnerable labor forces. Yet, Brueggemann maintains that such claims to absolute power are ultimately unsustainable, as exemplified by the narrative of Exodus, which exposes the fallacy of oppressive regimes. It is the insistent wisdom of the narrative, always being re-performed and reasserted, that the claim of Pharaoh is a charade; every time a powerful charade, but every time it is unsustainable (Exodus 2:23 NRSV), and we learned yet again that there is nothing absolute or perpetual about such claims by the regime. [73] Moreover, Brueggemann emphasizes the necessity for sincere individuals of faith to engage in ongoing dialogue and reevaluation, especially when faced with disagreements. He laments the tendency within the church for individuals to become entrenched in their beliefs, inhibiting open-minded engagement with differing perspectives. Brueggemann advocates for a return to the foundational narratives as a means of fostering renewed dialogue and understanding among members of the faith community.[74]

Process Thinkers

John Boswell Cobb, a towering figure in both religious pluralism and process theology, has left a transcendent mark on interfaith dialogue through his expansive approach. Cobb is renowned for his ability to seamlessly weave perspicacity from divergent areas of study,

AmeriKan Church." The Puritans played significant roles in shaping the colonial mindset and the subjugation of Indigenous bodies in America through their religious beliefs and practices. Viewing themselves as God's chosen people, a political and social hierarchy, with a divine mandate to establish a model society based on their interpretation of biblical principles, a sense of religious exceptionalism fueled their perception of Indigenous peoples as heathens in need of salvation and civilization. This belief system justified land dispossession and the imposition of European values onto Indigenous cultures.

[73] Walter Brueggemann, *Delivered into Covenant Pivotal Moments in the Book of Exodus, Part Two* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 9-10.

[74] Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2001; Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Philadelphia, PA.: Fortress Press, 1986).

fostering vibrant communication across previously siloed disciplines. He challenges the often-held belief that Yeshua serves as the exclusive conduit for God's presence in the world.[75] Instead, Cobb argues that the wisdom embodied in Yeshua reflects universal wisdom already accessible to all.[76] He views the traditional assertion of Yeshua's exclusivity as implicitly diminishing the Divine nature of this wisdom, contradicting the very essence of the Christian concept of incarnation, which forms the bedrock of Christo-centrism. The wisdom embodied in Yeshua himself, according to Cobb, emphasizes the inherent potential for each individual to discover the divine, God's presence, within.[77]

Cobb's unique conception of Yeshua centers on creative transformation, which he posits as God's active engagement with the world, encompassing but not exhausting the entirety of God's existence. Consequently, "Christ as creative transformation" embodies the incarnation of God rather than an exhaustive representation of God.[78] While distinct from the figure of Yeshua, this concept remains deeply intertwined with his historical significance. For Cobb, Yeshua's message served as a disruptive force, prompting his listeners to break free from their perceived limitations and embrace God's ever-present offer of new possibilities, possibilities for divine encounter. Cobb envisioned this "new" not as a negation or a complete departure from the past, but rather as a catalyst for its creative transformation.[79] This perspective led him to propose that

[75] John B. Cobb and Paul F Knitter, *Transforming Christianity and the World: A Way Beyond Absolutism and Relativism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 80, 83; John B. Cobb, *God and the World* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2000), 9.

[76] Cobb and Knitter, *Transforming Christianity and the World*, 1999.

[77] Cobb, *God and the World*, 2000.

[78] JeeHo Kim, Rolf Bouma, and Mark Mann, "Cobb, John B., Jr.," Boston Collaborative Encyclopedia of Western Theology: John Cobb, 2004, https://people.bu.edu/wwildman/bce/mwt_themes_850_cobb.htm.

[79] John B. Cobb, *Jesus' Abba: The God Who Has Not Failed* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015).

Yeshua's life and death created a powerful field, immersion in which unlocks the potential for individual transformation.[80]

Cobb poses a provocative question: what if Christians felt compelled to integrate the Gautama Buddha into their internal narrative?[81] Recognizing that this impetus originates from Yeshua's teachings, he ponders whether this inclusion would simply enlarge their existing perspective while maintaining Yeshua at the center, or instead, usher in a new center that displaces Yeshua's initial centrality.[82] Cobb encourages open-mindedness towards the possibility of Yeshua's dethronement from the central position, arguing that true faith expresses itself in actions whose consequences are inherently unpredictable. Ultimately, Cobb posits that faithfulness to Yeshua may ultimately lead to his displacement as the primary focus, a consequence that, while unforeseen, can be understood as an act of faith in itself.[83]

Alfred North Whitehead, a pioneering mathematician and philosopher, laid the groundwork for Process Philosophy and Process Theology, a novel approach to metaphysics and meta-spirituality. In his exploration, Whitehead makes a seemingly paradoxical claim: religion can be both the last refuge for human savagery and simultaneously the main instrument of human progress.[84] This duality underscores the crucial need for religion to undergo unceasing metamorphosis, transforming its outer life through integration with science while remaining true to its inner essence.

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[80] John B. Cobb, *A Christian Natural Theology: Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2008).

[81] John B. Cobb and Christopher Ives, eds., *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005).

[82] Kim, Bouma, and Mann, "Cobb, John B., Jr.," 2004.

[83] Cobb and Ives, eds., *The Emptying God*, 2005.

[84] Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 1926.

Whitehead outlines two key requirements for religious leaders to navigate this ongoing transformation. Firstly, he emphasizes that religion transcends collective enthusiasms, revivals, institutions, churches, rituals, bibles, and codes of behavior.[85] This suggests that outward expressions hold value only insofar as they embody authentic spiritual experience. Secondly, he asserts that the process of metamorphosis should not be perceived as a betrayal of older doctrines but rather as a necessary step towards deeper spiritual insight. Abandoning outdated ideas signifies progress, not the defeat of religion.[86] Whitehead further underscores the critical relationship between religion and science, arguing that the future course of history depends upon the decision of this generation to navigate the relation between them.[87] This statement highlights the vital role both disciplines play in shaping humanity's trajectory. He acknowledges that while religious dogmas might require modification based on evolving knowledge, the core of religion, fueled by direct experience, offers invaluable contributions.[88]

Ultimately, Whitehead paints a nuanced picture of religion, refusing to romanticize it as universally good. He describes it as the vision of something which stands beyond, behind, and within, the passing flux of immediate things, a yearning for an ideal that simultaneously exists and remains ever elusive. While acknowledging its potential pitfalls, he recognizes the profound meaning and purpose religion can offer. This complex understanding sets the stage for further exploration of how religion can evolve and contribute to human progress while staying true to its core values.[89]

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[85] Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 1926.

[86] Alfred North Whitehead, *Science in the Modern World* (New York, NY: The MacMillan Company, 1925), 181, 238; Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 1926.

[87] Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[88] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York, NY: The Free Press, 2010).

[89] Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1997); Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2010).

Reframed Theology Thinkers

Henry Corbin, a multifaceted scholar encompassing philosophy, theology, Iranian studies, and Islamic mysticism, embarked on a spiritual journey deeply influenced by Suhrawardi's writings. This path led him to a profound hypothesis: imagination stands as the primary gateway to engage with creation, with prayer acting as the catalyst for a renewed vision.[90] Through his own spiritual practice, Corbin discerned the entire cosmos as a "theophany of the Divine," a finite reflection of the singular Ultimate Reality.[91] Consequently, his life's mission became devoted to liberating humanity's religious imagination from the shackles of fundamentalism.

This liberation hinges on the pivotal role of the imagination. Corbin posits it as the stage upon which the Unique Divine and the tangible world intermingle and descend into a shared "abode." It is specifically the "Active Imagination" that bridges the invisible and the visible, the spiritual and the physical, fostering a relationship of "sympathy" between them.[92] Corbin cites his sheikh, who posits that through this active imagination, one can "love a being of the sensible world, in whom we love the manifestation of the divine Beloved."[93] This process involves "spiritualizing" the beloved by "raising him (from sensible form) to incorruptible Image," imbuing them with a higher beauty and an enduring presence.[94] In this state, mysticism becomes an unending union with the divine Beloved.

[90] Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 156.
[91] Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 2014.
[92] Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Ṣūfism of Ibn 'Arabī* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).
[93] Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, 1998.
[94] Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 2014.

Prayer, for Corbin, transcends mere supplication; it embodies the highest form of the Creative Imagination. He emphasizes that prayer is not simply requesting something, but rather expressing a fundamental mode of being, a way of existing and bringing forth existence. The "organ" of prayer becomes the heart, a psycho-spiritual center brimming with focused energy and "himma" (spiritual intention). Through this potent force, prayer becomes a "creator" of vision.[95] Furthermore, Corbin introduces the realm of "Idea-Images," an intermediate world existing between the realm apprehensible by pure intellect and the realm of sensory perception. This space, inhabited by archetypal figures, subtle substances, and "immaterial matter," possesses its own objective reality, distinct from both the intelligible and the sensible worlds. It serves as a nexus where "the spiritual takes body and the body becomes spiritual," a universe composed of real matter and extension, albeit on a subtler and immaterial plane compared to the physical world.

Accessing this realm lies within the domain of the active imagination, functioning as the stage for theophanic visions and symbolic narratives to unfold in their authentic reality. In exploring this intermediary world, Corbin emphasizes the inadequacy of the term "imaginary," arguing that its inherent ambiguity undermines the true reality attainable within this unique, mediating sphere. By unveiling the imagination as a potent tool for spiritual engagement and liberation, Corbin's vision paves the way for a profound reconceptualization of our relationship with the divine. His exploration dismantles the limitations of fundamentalist interpretations and invites us to embrace a dynamic, imaginative encounter with the sacred dimension woven within the very fabric of creation.[96]

[95] Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 2014.
[96] Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 2014; Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, 1998.

Bishop John Shelby Spong emerges as a pivotal figure in contemporary theological discourse, advocating for a fundamental reimagining of Christian belief methodology, steering it away from theism and traditional doctrines towards a more expansive Christian ethic characterized by compassion and inclusivity. Central to Spong's body of work is his critique of popular and literal interpretations of Christian scripture, which he deems unsustainable in addressing the challenges faced by contemporary Christian communities. Spong challenges the trustworthiness of theism as a valid expression of God's nature, advocating instead for a nuanced approach to scripture informed by scholarship and love.[97] He follows the example set by Yeshua Christ, who epitomized the presence of a compassionate and selfless God, as reflected in the ekklēsía's proclamation, "Yeshua is Lord." This proclamation, according to Spong, signifies Yeshua's adoption as God's child, marking the Divine's full incarnation within him and offering the potential for similar incarnation within humanity. Spong draws upon Yeshua's use of "I Am" in John 4:26, mirroring God's self-identification in Exodus 3:14, to underscore this possibility.[98] By adopting this phrase, Spong suggests Yeshua was demonstrating his complete oneness with God and the potential for this oneness to extend to all.

Spong interprets this proclamation as an affirmation of Yeshua's adoption by God and the potential for God's incarnation in humanity.[99] This understanding aligns with the divine self-revelation in Exodus 3:14, where God identifies Godself as "I Am."[100] Spong underscores the

[97] John Shelby Spong, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2009).

[98] Cindi McMenamin, "What Is the Significance of the Jesus '7 'I Am' Statements in John?" Crosswalk.com, April 23, 2021, https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/what-is-the-significance-of-the-7-i-am-statements-in-john.html; Michael LeFebvre, "'I Am Who I Am'? The Real Meaning of God's Name in Exodus," The Center for Hebraic Thought, February 12, 2022, https://hebraicthought.org/meaning-of-gods-name-i-am-exodus/.

[99] John Shelby Spong, *Jesus for the Non-Religious* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2009), 9; John Shelby Spong, *The Fourth Gospel: Tales of a Jewish Mystic* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2014).

[100] LeFebvre, "'I Am Who I Am'," The Center for Hebraic Thought.

significance of this revelation, particularly for oppressed and marginalized communities, as it signifies God's presence with them in their struggle for liberation.[101] Spong asserts that God transcends human religious systems, affirming that these systems merely serve as pathways to the divine mystery rather than defining it.[102] By adopting this phrase, Spong suggests Yeshua was demonstrating his complete oneness with God and the potential for this oneness to extend to all.[103]

Spong further expands his understanding of God by rejecting the limitations of religious labels. He asserts that God doesn't adhere to any specific faith system, be it Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or otherwise. These systems, he argues, represent human attempts to comprehend the divine mystery. While acknowledging the value of his own tradition, he emphasizes that it merely guides him towards God, not defines it. He emphasizes the inherent mystery of the divine, urging humanity to walk into and experience it rather than attempting to define it through rigid doctrines.[104] Spong criticizes the association of Yeshua with medieval doctrines rooted in outdated assumptions. He argues that this association traps Yeshua within the confines of the "hysterically religious" and restricts opportunities for meaningful theological exploration. To remain relevant, Spong emphasizes the need to liberate Yeshua from this restrictive interpretation and rediscover him through a lens of empathy and critical understanding.[105] Finally, Spong reinterprets the foundational event of the Christian narrative, the resurrection. He

[101] John Shelby Spong, *Beyond Moralism* (New York, NY: HarperCollins e-books, 2011).

[102] John Shelby Spong, *Biblical Literalism: A Gentile Heresy: A Journey into a New Christianity Through the Doorway of Matthew's Gospel* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2017).

[103] John Shelby Spong, *Jesus for the Non-Religious* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2009), 9; John Shelby Spong, *A New Christianity for a New World: Why Traditional Faith Is Dying & How a New Faith Is Being Born* (New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 2009).

[104] Spong, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die*, 2009; Spong, Biblical Literalism, 2017.

[105] John Shelby Spong, *Unbelievable: Why Neither Ancient Creeds nor the Reformation Can Produce a Living Faith Today* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2019).

rejects the literal interpretation of an empty tomb and reanimated body, instead proposing a deeper meaning. He proposes the resurrection signifies God's act of elevating Yeshua into the very being of God.[106] This signifies the inherent potential for humans to experience a similar union with the divine, transcending physical limitations and embodying the love and compassion that Yeshua exemplified. Spong's provocative theological framework challenges long-held assumptions and invites a transformative reimagining of the Christian narrative.[107] His emphasis on love, inclusivity, and a nuanced understanding of God offers a compelling vision for a faith relevant to the contemporary world.

Henri Jozef Machiel Nouwen, a Catholic priest, professor, and prolific writer, embarked on a journey coupling psychology and spirituality to explore the human dimensions of faith. Through his doctoral studies in psychology, Nouwen delved into the intricacies of the human psyche, embracing his own emotional and spiritual vulnerabilities as a means to perceive his identity as God's Beloved. This profound realization became the cornerstone of Nouwen's spiritual formation, leading him to share this discovery with others as a template for their own spiritual growth. Central to Nouwen's theology was the acknowledgment of brokenness and self-doubt as inherent aspects of the human condition, fostering a theology of service that embraced woundedness as a pathway to deeper communion with God and others.[108]

Nouwen's reflections on theological formation underscored the gradual and often challenging process of encountering the incomprehensibility of God, recognizing that true spiritual growth stems from an acknowledgment of the divine mystery that transcends human

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[106] Spong, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die*, 2009; Spong, *Eternal Life*, 2010.

[107] Spong, *Biblical Literalism*, 2017; Spong, *Unbelievable*, 2019; Spong, *Jesus for the Non-Religious*, 2009.

[108] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Seeds of Hope: A Henri Nouwen Reader*, ed. Robert Durback (New York, NY: Darton, Longman + Todd, 1997).

grasp.[109] He emphasized the transition from speaking about Yeshua, instead seeking to embody his teachings allowing Yeshua to speak within oneself, from thinking about Yeshua to letting Yeshua shape one's thoughts, and from acting for Yeshua to allowing Yeshua to act through oneself. This transformative shift required a profound simplification and unification of one's perspective, centering on the convergence of time and eternity, earth and heaven, and human and divine realities.[110]

At the heart of Nouwen's spirituality was the concept of being chosen as the Beloved of God, a revelation that transformed one's relationship with oneself and others. Instead of exclusivity, being the Beloved entailed inclusivity, accepting others in their uniqueness and embracing compassionate choice over competitiveness.[111] Nouwen recognized the profound inner task faced by individuals in coming to terms with the inner reality of God's presence. Just as external perceptions of God could range from love to fear, the internal experience of God demanded discernment between creative and destructive forces.[112] Drawing from the experiences of Spanish mystics like St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, Nouwen underscored the importance of spiritual guidance in navigating the complexities of the inner spiritual landscape and distinguishing between life-giving and chaotic influences.[113]

Howard Washington Thurman, a multifaceted figure encompassing theologian, author, educator, civil rights leader, mystic, and philosopher, championed liberation as freedom from

[109] Nouwen, *Seeds of Hope*, 1997.

[110] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York, NY: Crown Publishing Group, 2013); Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Finding Our Sacred Center: A Journey to Inner Peace* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2011).

[111] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World* (New York, NY: John Murray Press, 2016).

[112] Nouwen, *Seeds of Hope*, 1997.

[113] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Finding Our Sacred Center: A Journey to Inner Peace* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2011).

oppression. He viewed loving one's neighbor as a call to see and treat them as oneself, a principle reflected in his co-founding of the first major interracial, interdenominational church in the United States.[114]

Thurman's theological perspective was deeply rooted in the movement of the Spirit of God, which often compelled individuals to act against the prevailing spirit of their times or anticipate a spirit yet to emerge.[115] Through moments of dedication, individuals were bestowed with wisdom and courage to challenge existing norms and inspire hope for a more just and compassionate future. Central to Thurman's teachings was the recognition that those most marginalized and oppressed in society – the homeless, the working and jobless poor, the substance abused and abusers, and the alienated youth – often existed beyond the purview of Yeshua's proclaimed followers.[116] He criticized faith communities for often finding it perilous and risky to follow Yeshua into these "hard places" inhabited by the "disinherited." Conversely, he noted the lack of welcoming spaces for these marginalized individuals within established worship communities.[117]

Thurman offered a provocative interpretation of Yeshua's message, seeing Christianity in its origin as a "technique of survival for the oppressed."[118] He acknowledged its historical transformation into a tool of the powerful but argued that this deviation should not obscure its original liberatory essence. He emphasized that wherever Yeshua's spirit manifests, the

[114] Howard Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream: The Story of the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009).
[115] Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream*, 2009.
[116] Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2022).
[117] Howard Thurman, *The Inward Journey* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 2007).; Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 2022; Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream*, 2009.
[118] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 2022.

oppressed find renewed courage. This, he contended, stemmed from Yeshua's message that fear, hypocrisy, and hatred – the "three hounds of hell" – need not hold dominion over them.[119]

While humanity works to embody the divine within – the *Self* – in the movement towards *gnosis*,[120] the Black Body must consider the derivation of the institutionalized Black Church. Notably, without the presence of Black Bodies in AmeriKa, European AmeriKans would not be "White." As seen throughout AmeriKa's history of assimilating Bodies with lighter hues towards whiteness, these lighter-hued bodies were once comparable and complementary to Black Bodies engaged in class, ethnic, and gender struggles over resources and bodily identity.[121] Notably, therefore, White supremacist or Puritan ideology is based principally on the degradation of Black Bodies in order to control them. This can be witnessed in the dogmas and doctrines evangelized by Puritan ideology to indoctrinate White Bodies unremittingly with the knowledge of how to perpetually control enslaved Black Bodies by creating fear and distrust among the enslaved bodies by causing divisiveness within the group. This White Body curriculum endorsed fragmentation – the breaking – of the nigger[122] by:

> Pitching the Old Black Male versus the Young Black Male; Dark Skin Slaves versus the Light Skin Slaves; Female versus the Male; Mother versus Child, for by breaking her into complete submission, she will train her offspring to submit to labor; White Body versus Black Body, where white servants and overseers distrust

[119] Howard Thurman, *Disciplines of the Spirit* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 2003); Howard Thurman, *Temptations of Jesus* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1997).

[120] Gnosis is personal, transformative knowledge gained through lived experience, resonating with the emphasis on praxis and liberation arising from the margins and calling this newly enlightened individual to engage critically and creatively, in helping to transform humanity towards justice and liberation.

[121] McKenna, *The Puritan Origins of American Patriotism*, 2007; Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 2003.

[122] Randall Kennedy, "Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word," The Washington Post, January 11, 2001, https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/books/chap1/nigger.htm. "Nigger" is derived from the Latin word for the color black and did not originate as a slur but took on a derogatory connotation over time. No one knows precisely when or how "niger" turned derisively into "nigger" and attained a pejorative meaning. We do know, however, that by the end of the first third of the nineteenth century, "nigger" had already become a familiar and influential insult.

> all Blacks, while the enslaved loves, respects, depends upon, and trusts only White Bodies.[123]

Once under control and in perennial fear of these White Bodies, this fear is sustained by convincing Black Bodies that their Bodies – the Self – are ugly, their intellect is inherently underdeveloped, their culture less civilized, and their future warranting less concern than that of other Bodies. Meanwhile, White Bodies are distinguished by their ability to promote the sanctity of whiteness by devaluing that which is non-White.[124]

It is now from this Oppressed Body that a Black Body must be considered when the Black Body starts to look at the origin of when the belief systems and practices of the followers of "*a* Way"[125] was adopted and aligned itself with the temporal power of Constantine, the Royal Imagination of Empire. In this adoption, the belief system of the followers of Yeshua of Yehoshua (Jesus the Nazarene) became utterly distorted and ceased to be "*a* Way." These little Christs, a distinct movement within the diverse Body of first-century covenantal Judaism,[126] who had spread the ways and movements of the Yeshua of Yehoshua through oral traditions, became a re-creation of imperial domination and took on the moniker of Christianity. Prior to Rome's homogenization of Christianity, the religion of Rome was inexorably influenced by the tenets of Rome's leaders. Progressively, these empirical ethicalities became part of the institutionalized

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[123] Lynch, *The Willie Lynch Letter and the Making of a Slave*, (Long Island City, NY: African Tree Press, 2017), 6-7, 10, 14, 25.

[124] Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2001), 85.; Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll, N.Y, NY: Orbis Books, 1999).

[125] Gregory K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 697-698, 701, Accessed August 3, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central. The Way is a symbolic movement of Jesus' followers from an unspiritual condition to the process of undergoing spiritual restoration, thereby identifying the *Ekklesia* as God's Body - The Body of God. In replacing "the" with the noun "a," I am indicating that Christianity is not the only way - "The Way" - to come into relation with the Most Divine.

[126] Marcus J. Borg, "A Chronological New Testament," in *Evolution of the Word: The New Testament in the Order the Books Were Written* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2012), pp. 1-10. The covenantal theology of the Jews held to a theology focused on radical monotheism: *God is one*, promise and hope: material provision for God's followers and God's desire for world justice and peace, observance: living according to the law.

commonplace religious ideologies, whereby Caesar and Caesar's underlings became deities that had to be worshiped. As Rome's religious practices stemmed from the amalgamation of a mixture of the beliefs, traditions, and superstitions of the aristocracy, the addition of Christianity as the Pax Romana's official religion under the Constantinian shift was rudimental.[127]

It is under the empirical dominion of the Pax Romana that much of the documents and creeds of the followers of "*a* Way"[128] were written.[129] The insertion of *the* Way into Roman polytheism[130] caused a great shift in the practices and belief systems of the Bodies of *a* Way. Prior to its Roman colonizing appropriation, Yeshua, the founder of "*a* Way," used parables with moral lessons to communicate his ethic of agapē love.[131] Yeshua emphasized what Christians now call the Fruitage of the Spirit,[132] along with the assertation of the connection of the Most

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[127] Valerie M. Warrior, "The Gods and Their Worship." In *Roman Religion*, 1-14. *Cambridge Introduction to Roman Civilization* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2006), doi:10.1017/CBO9780511814747.002.

[128] Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993); Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch, Geffrey B. Kelly, and Victoria Barnett (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015). In Christian theology, the term "the Way" is often used to refer to the path or journey of discipleship and following the teachings of Yeshua. Scholars and theologians have interpreted "the Way" not merely as a set of beliefs but as a way of life centered on Yeshua's teachings, embodying principles of love, compassion, justice, and service to others. By slightly adjusting the wording to "a Way," it underscores the universal call for both Christians and non-Christians alike to live out their faith in practical ways, engaging with the world around them with love, compassion, and justice.

[129] Ali Parchami, "The Pax Romana," in *Hegemonic Peace and Empire: The Pax Romana, Britannica, and Americana* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), pp. 31-57; Marcus J. Borg and Marcus J. Borg, "A Chronological New Testament," in *Evolution of the Word: The New Testament in the Order the Books Were Written* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2012), pp. 1-10. In Roman history, the Pax Romana was a time of relative peace and increased imperialism while the Roman Empire was at its biggest size extending from northern Britain to the coast of the Arabian Peninsula, and from the shores of the Atlantic to the Euphrates. Rome maintained a (1) politically oppressive regime: *the people had no voice or power*, (2) economically exploitive regime: *economy was built on the self-interest of the elites*, (3) chronically violent regime: *the elites held on through power by violent means*, (4) an Empire legitimated by religious claims: *Kings and Queens ruled by Divine right, and God put the division between to ruler and the slave*.

[130] The Romans looked for commutuality between their gods and those of the tenanted and oppressed Bodies of the Roman Empire. For the case of political peace (easiness) and prosperity and the historical assimilation of deities and traditions within the religious belief system of the Roman Empire, Roman Polytheism adopted myths, folklore, and art (imagination).

[131] The Apostle Paul attempts to evidence Jesus' agapē ethic: Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable; it keeps no record of wrongs; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends (1 Corinthians 13: 4-8a NRSV).

[132] The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22 NRSV).

Divine with the divine within the Self.[133] In its post-Roman colonization and empirical domination, the belief system of the Way experienced a mammoth shift in its moral ethos to an ethos replete with colonial Christianity. In the movement from a Romanized Christianity to the Puritan Christianity of AmeriKa, the Black Church has had a similar experience and is in the midst of still traversing the path from *a* Way and must work on demythologizing this Empirical Puritan Christianity. As already demonstrated, the Christian story did not drop from heaven fully written. It has been under the hands of the potter, being molded on different potter's wheels throughout the millennium.

The movement of *a* Way has always been an evolving story, an unfinished narrative ever searching for a more authentic form of Christianity, a Christianity returning to the agapē ethic of the Messiah – Yeshua of Yehoshua. And this movement back toward the agapē ethic of Yeshua is no different from the call for the Black Bodies of the Black Church to move further along toward the agapē ethic of Christ. Understandably, nobody escapes being wounded, whether physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually, and this includes both the Black Church as an entity and the Black Bodies within that entity. Within the Black Church, one of the greatest pains impressed upon Black Bodies has to do with the issues of the racism of Puritan Christianity imposed upon the spiritual word.

Unequivocally, race is the child of racism; a process of naming Bodies and ascribing them into a hierarchical setting in which the belief in the preeminence of Bodies of a fairer hue are indelibly believed to be superior to Bodies of a darker hue. Both secularly and in the sacred realm of Christianity, race – or the oppression of what has been made the subservient body – is

[133] I (Jesus) ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their word that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be (one) in us. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one (John 17: 20-23).

hate that gives identity. "The nigger, the fag, the bitch illuminates the border, illuminates what we ostensibly are not, illuminates the Dream of being white, of being a Man. We name the hated strangers – terrorists, despots, barbarians, and other enemies of civilization – and are thus falsely self-confirmed in the tribe of the privileged."[134] It is now, while still in the belly of a pregnant colonized Puritan Christian ethic that the Black faith believers are called back, as a piece of wet clay, into the original potter's hands.[135]

While being molded by the Master Potter on their journey towards the incarnation of the agapē love ethic, believers must recollect that there will be great opposition from those indoctrinated with the Royal Imagination, the guarantors of the status quo. The upholders of the Royal Imagination want to perpetuate the maintenance of the status quo as their perceived safety is only retained as long as they use their power to give the othered a sense of insecurity is kept intact.[136] In AmeriKa, one of the keys used as a means of control behavior by privileged Bodies, as counseled in the Willie Lynch Letter, is the divisiveness of race and culture. As race and culture touch everything, it is impossible to do any justice work, especially when related to the Most Divine and establishing a shift from colonial language to a prophetic language, without beginning with looking at race and culture in a theopoetic light.

[134] Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York, NY: Random House Us, 2015), 7, 60.

[135] God told Jeremiah, "Up on your feet! Go to the potter's house. When you get there, I'll tell you what I have to say." So, I went to the potter's house, and sure enough, the potter was there, working away at his wheel. Whenever the pot the potter was working on turned out badly, as sometimes happens when you are working with clay, the potter would simply start over and use the same clay to make another pot…. "Can't I do just as this potter does, people of Israel?" God's Decree! "Watch this potter. In the same way that this potter works his clay, I work on you, people of Israel (Jeremiah 18: 1-6 MSG)."

[136] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 14. This is done by controlling the behavior of those who are othered and oppressed.

The Concept of Race

Before looking at the concept of race, one must first start with the history of the human species, which comes from two wellsprings: paleoanthropology and the historical corollaries of the human genome. Substantiated both biblically and scientifically, through existing fossils, modern humans originated in Africa. And the earliest modern human fossils found outside of Africa originate from the Middle East, nearly one hundred thousand years after the African fossils. As people moved out of Africa, scientists discovered that the African populations exhibit greater genetic diversity, a resource for adaptation of the species. As humans continued to migrate throughout Africa and into the rest of the world, the opportunity for the breakdown of humanity into more exclusive communities started.[137] This is the setting from which humanity begins to shift from oneness to a dangerous and divergent multiplicity, a social construction that gives or denies benefits and privileges to human Bodies. One of the most divisive divisions occurs in the construction of race.

The social construct of race as we know it today is a modern human invention forged historically through whiteness, oppression, slavery, and conquest, which evolved alongside the formation of the United States to describe and categorize people into various social groups based on characteristics like skin color, physical features, and genetic heredity as a process of ascribing social meaning to those groups.[138] Thus, the meaning and feeling of race shifted with the onset

[137] Joy A. Degruy Leary and Randall Robinson, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (Stone Mountain, GA: Joy DeGruy Publications Incorporated, 2017), iii. This was demonstrated in the division both of and in the desire to experience royal privilege through the differentiation of gender roles, family, clan, village, nationality, ethnicity, and race. This is the theo-poetic greeting of the Maasai Warrior tribe - *Kasserian Ingera*. The greeting of one of the fiercest warrior tribes known to humanity is - "And how are the Children?" - as they put a high value on the well-being of children, the future. The answer to the question - "All the Children are well!" - references that peace and safety prevail and that priorities of protecting the young, powerless, and the oppressed are in place.

[138] David R. Roedier, "Historical Foundations of Race," National Museum of African American History and Culture, October 11, 2019, https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/historical-foundations-race;

and dissemination of White Puritan European colonialism and imperialism. While the concept of *race* originally functioned similarly to the conceptualization of the word ethnicity today – Bodies[139] connected by common descent or origin – the hunger for greater European colonialism and imperialism burgeoned as White Bodies encountered supposed deficient human Bodies from contradistinctive parts of the world. Standing in the privilege of their royal imagination, they speculated – in a diminutive way – about the physical, social, and cultural differences amongst human Bodies. These Royal Bodies[140] began to use *race* to categorize human Bodies through their own privileged lens, creating the social stratification operationalized out of the context of African enslavement. In her essay, *The Slavebody and the Blackbody*, Toni Morrison delves deep into the contextualization of race in AmeriKa. She states:

> When I use the term "slavebody" to distinguish it from "black-body," I mean to underscore the fact that slavery and racism are two separate phenomena. The origins of slavery are not necessarily (or even ordinarily) racist. Selling and owning people is old commerce. There are probably no people in the world whose ancestors were no slaves. If you are Christian, among your people were slaves; if you are Jewish, among your people were slaves; if you are Hindu, among your people were slaves; if you are Buddhist, among your people were slaves; if you are Muslim, among your people were the enslaved. If your ancestors are European, they lived under the serfdom of eastern Europe, the tenancy of feudalism in England, in Viking Querope, Visigothic Spain, Venice, Genoa, and Florence. The majority of the population of ancient Rome, ancient Greece, Medieval Ghana, Songhai Mali, Dahomey, and Ashanti kingdoms all were deliberately constructed slave societies. Slavery was critical to the world of Islam and systematic in the Orient. We are all implicated in the institution of enslavement. However, the colonists of the New World, in following the pattern of societies dependent on free labor, enslaved Indigenous Bodies, and would have imported any foreign group available, capable, and survivable. And the foreigners from Africa - Black Bodies - fit the bill because

Erin Blakemore, "Race and Ethnicity Facts and Information," Culture (National Geographic, May 3, 2021), https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/race-ethnicity.

[139] "Bodies" has nothing to do with identity, nationality, or ethnicity. In this sentence, Bodies literally means that people live in a structure that is predicated on pigmentality. A structure that determines who is human or who is not based on pigment. White Bodies have deemed themselves as the Supreme structure by which everything else will be judged.

[140] I am using the term Royal Bodies synonymously with White Bodies and Privileged Bodies.

> they were clever, strong, adaptable, creative, spiritual, and intensely interested in their children.[141]

Accordingly, Royal Bodies, and most of the world-wide society began to forget that the belief that a person's race innately determined and justified their social superiority or inferiority to other Bodies was contrived. Rather, it bolstered the idea of White Body Supremacy, where the White Body deemed and continually deems itself the supreme standard by which all human Bodies shall be measured structurally and philosophically. There is no identity that White Bodies are that Bodies of culture also are. And it is through AmeriKa's[142] enduring structure of the plantation, and White Body privilege that these Royal Bodies ascribing direct lineage to Yeshua Christ - being more godly, more human, more intelligent, more moral, and more capable than those who were not white - fully ascribed to a movement and belief system which was antithetical to the agapē love ethic of Yeshua of Yehoshua.[143]

AmeriKa's history, enduringly based on the structure of the plantation, demonstrates the very fact that at its inception, "Whiteness" was not viewed in the same way as it is in AmeriKa today. The first Bodies that the Puritans attempted to enslave and place on AmeriKa's plantations were the poor of England and Ireland – the oppressed and those of differing ethnicity.

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[141] Toni Morrison, "The Slavebody and the Blackbody," in *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2021), pp. 74-78. While agreeing with the fact that practically everyone has an ancestor that was enslavement, enslavement in AmeriKa is this only enslavement in which Bodies were treated as chattel and non-human.

[142] Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Age of Revolution, 1789-1848* (London, UK: Phoenix Publishing House, 2000); Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism A Theoretical Overview*, trans. Shelley Laura Frisch (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2010). The term "AmeriKa" is employed in this dissertation with acknowledgment of its historical origins. Coined in the 19th century, it emerged in the works of German anti-imperialist and socialist groups as a critique of American capitalism and imperialism. Similarly, it appeared in communist publications in the early 20th century, often carrying anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist connotations. Its utilization here aligns with the context and themes of the dissertation, underscoring the critique of American power structures deeply rooted in colonialism and white supremacy. This usage also aligns with the paper's theme of decolonizing the Black Church.

[143] Kate Berg et al., eds., "The Use of Racial, Ethnic, and Ancestral Categories in Human Genetics Research," *The American Journal of Human Genetics* 77, no. 4 (2005): pp. 519-532, https://doi.org/10.1086/491747, 519-532; David R. Roediger, "Historical Foundations of Race," National Museum of African American History and Culture, December 16, 2021, https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/historical-foundations-race. I am here intentionally using the term Jesus Christ as this is the Latinized version of the Aramaic Yeshua.

At that time, White and Black indentured servants and the enslaved were treated the same way. Being in the same metaphorical boat, the oppressed human Bodies,[144] regardless of skin color, joined together to revolt or run away from their enslavers enduringly. Albeit both classes of Bodies ran away together – slave and servant, Black and White – punishment for Black Bodies was much more severe, to the point of the first legal sanctioning of lifelong slavery.[145] Yet, as these enslaved White Bodies started to step into their Royal Bodies, White Body Privilege, they realized that as they ran away from their enslavers, they could hide in plain sight and not be sought.[146] Upon apprehending the economic impact of having these new, purloined, Royal Bodies under oppression, White Bodies soon changed AmeriKa's laws to protect these newly amalgamated White Bodies, enabling these Bodies to then collectively have little or no efficacy or agility regarding the definition of race. The thirteen colonies were filled with Colonized White Bodies who were fleeing their present, and upon arriving in the "New World," a present which had become past they never had to go back and process and resolve. As brutalized and oppressed bodies in their own right, they learned the template of both the victim and the perpetrator. With an opportunity to remove themselves from oppression, the Bodies moved from victim to perpetrator, intentionally weaving anti-blackness and Indigenous invisibility into the very

[144] Remember that in AmeriKa's journey to becoming a nation, non-white Bodies started being considered as other than fully human.

[145] Rodney D. Coates, "Law and the Cultural Production of Race and Racialized Systems of Oppression: Early American Court Cases," *American Behavioral Scientist* (Sage Journals, November 1, 2003), https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0002764203256190. 329-351. In one 1640 court case in Virginia, three servants - Victor, "a Dutchman," and James Gregory, "a Scotchman," and John Punch, "a Negro"- belonging to Hugh Gwyn, who had run away were captured and returned. Victor and James Gregory were each sentenced to be beaten and have four years added to their indentures. Antagonistically, the third servant, John Punch's punishment, was much more severe. John, who, similar to his running mates, ran away as an indentured servant. Upon his capture, John was sentenced to become the first official slave in AmeriKa. This decision to permanently enslave John Punch represents the first legal distinction between Europeans and Africans, Blacks and Whites.

[146] Menakem, *Somatic Abolitionism*, 2022. Racism and White Body Supremacy/Privilege is not about Hatred First. It's about self Interest First. Hatred is a useful byproduct of that self-interest - something the middle and lower classes can grab onto.

structure that makes up AmeriKa and our Global System. Henceforth, due to racial animus, the enslaved – Black Bodies – came to be defined by the color of their skin.[147]

Race touches everything, and it is impossible to do any justice work, expressly when related to the Most Divine, without beginning with race. For Black Bodies and the Black Church, chattel slavery plays a significant part in their spiritual belief systems. So much so, that for the Puritan Christianity of AmeriKa, the Black Church has greatly assisted the colonizer: backing its ventures, helping its conscience, and promoting its theological belief system over their indigenous beliefs as a Body of the Way throughout its history.[148] In standing alongside the evangelizing of a puritan Christianity, the Black Church has internalized and promoted the acceptance of colonization, seemingly repudiating and forgetting the poverty and misery, the inequality and divisions, the conflict and violence that afflict Black Bodies and the Black Church beginning with the genocide of enslavement, the political oppression and economic exploitation of Blackness, and the cultural debasement that these Puritan Bodies put on Blackness. Thus, it is now time for Black Bodies and the Black Church to journey further into the ministry of agapē love. This prophetic ministry seeks to "nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us,[149] especially knowing that we, the members of the church, must unlearn habits, unlearn practices, unlearn rituals, and unlearn belief and faith systems that have served us well, and brought us to a semblance of liberation.

[147] Menakem, *Somatic Abolitionism*, 2022.

[148] Menakem, *Somatic Abolitionism*, 2022. While the black body and indigenous body is where AmeriKa has been taught to do its dirt. Black, Brown, and Othered Bodies have also been conditioned to shovel the same manure on Bodies that resemble our own Bodies while we simultaneously have been taught to hold that dirt. That is the design originated in the Plantation. Additionally, the use of "the way" here is intentional, as Puritan Christianity believes that their belief system was and is the only way to have a relationship with the most Divine.

[149] Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 3.

A critical question emerges: what guidance do our faith traditions offer to those marginalized and dispossessed? Our forebears, representing Black Bodies, serve as powerful examples of journeying within an agapē love ethic by engaging in prophetic imagination. Throughout history, interreligious faith leaders, from the era of enslavement to the present day, have provided us with examples, employing their imagination to reconnect the divine within with the utmost Divine itself.[150] In so doing, they have initiated, and we continue, a movement towards healing from the oppressive foundations of colonization by confronting the institution of chattel slavery. This prophetic imagination, invoked by Social Gospelers and Civil Rights Leaders in the past, persists today in the struggle against emerging forms of oppression, revealing a journey not only toward bodily liberation but also toward spiritual freedom.[151] Below are several illustrations of this prophetic imaginary journeying.

The Haitian Revolution, characterized by both social and economic upheaval, stands as a remarkable milestone in world history. Faced with formidable adversaries such as Napoléon Bonaparte and the French Empire, the interfaith revolutionaries, comprising both men and women, displayed remarkable courage and foresight in their endeavor to advance universal human rights during the early nineteenth century.[152] This revolution fundamentally altered the trajectory of history and reshaped relationships among peoples globally. Figures such as Toussaint L'Ouverture, Dutty Bookman, Cécile Fatiman, and Abdaraya Toya played pivotal roles in articulating a vision of human rights, culminating in the establishment of the second

[150] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 1997. The "divine" being the divinity found inside of the human Body as they are made in the imago and imitatio Dei, and "Divine" as in the Most Divine Being.

[151] Charles Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

[152] Arianna Gicciardi, dissertation, *The Haitian Revolution: Redefining Concepts And History* (Padua Thesis and Dissertation Archive, 2023), https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12608/11273; Toussaint L'Ouverture, *The Haitian Revolution*, ed. Jean-Bertrand Aristide and Nick Nesbitt (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2019).

independent state in modern history.[153] As the first free Black Republic in the new world, Ay-ti sought to champion equality for all Black Bodies within a political system historically dominated and manipulated by predominantly White Bodies. Enshrined in the Haitian Constitution of 1802 and 1804, the nation proclaimed legal equality for all citizens, irrespective of color, race, or status. This new political order fostered a new understanding of Bodily reality, a transformative reality wherein all individuals were recognized as equals: "tout neg se neg," signifying all are people.[154] To fully grasp the Haitian contribution to the evolution of human rights, it is imperative to contextualize this extraordinary revolution. The Haitian Revolution stands as the most comprehensive case study of revolutionary change in modern history.[155] Within a decade of continuous internal and international war, a colony primarily populated by enslaved people overturned both its colonial status and its economic system. These formerly enslaved individuals then established a new, sovereign political entity, with erstwhile slaves assuming positions of authority.[156]

Nathaniel Turner, born into enslavement as the child of another enslaved African Native, Nancy, inherited both fervent hatred of chattel slavery and African folk traditions from his mother's homeland.[157] Concurrently, Turner was also deeply immersed in the Christian faith, sharing the religious beliefs of his devout Grandmother and his enslavers.[158] Despite his enslavement, Turner exhibited exceptional curiosity, intelligence, and imagination from a young

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[153] David Patrick Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002).

[154] L'Ouverture, *The Haitian Revolution*, 2019.

[155] Michael Craton, *Empire, Enslavement, and Freedom in the Caribbean* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 2000).

[156] James, *The Black Jacobins*, 1963; Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, 2002.

[157] Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, NY: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2008).

[158] Nat Turner and Herbert Aptheker, *Nat Turner's Slave Rebellion Including the 1831 "Confessions"* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2006).

age, learning to read and write. He eventually emerged as a passionate preacher and leader among the enslaved, asserting that he had been chosen by God to lead them to freedom. This divine calling came to Turner after he had fled enslavement and experienced a profound spiritual revelation, prompting him to return to servitude as part of a higher mission.[159]

Upon his return, Turner employed a blend of religious syncretism, which blended ancestral African spirituality, traditional Indigenous practices, and Christianity, along with his belief in ongoing divine communication, fueled his determination for collective emancipation through direct action against the oppressive slave system.[160] The Nat Turner rebellion, characterized by its violent resistance against the oppression of white slave owners, was ultimately an act of self-defense by enslaved individuals against the structural advantages enjoyed by White Bodies.[161] Turner and his followers systematically targeted plantations, acting as disruptors and agitators, moved strategically between plantations, considered the pillars of American and global cultural structures, with the aim of neutralizing white enslavers.[162] The rebellion's impact was significant, prompting the Virginia legislature to briefly consider gradual emancipation. However, the deeply ingrained White Body Supremacy ideology ultimately led to increased restrictions on both enslaved and free Black Bodies.[163]

Shifting gears from Nat Turner, we now turn to Resmaa Menakem, a psychotherapist, justice leadership coach, and author. His work centers on leadership and self-care, particularly for individuals and communities navigating the enduring effects of white supremacy, racism, and

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[159] Nat Turner, *The Confessions of Nat Turner, the Leader of the Late Insurrection in Southampton, Virginia*, ed. Thomas R. Gray (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2011), 16, 18.

[160] Turner, *The Confessions of Nat Turner,* 2011.

[161] David S. Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2006).

[162] Turner and Aptheker, *Nat Turner's Slave Rebellion*, 2006.

[163] Turner, *The Confessions of Nat Turner,* 2011; William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, NY: Vintage Books/Library of America, 1990).

trauma. Menakem operates within the somatic field, prioritizing the healing of Black bodies and minds impacted by these oppressive systems.[164] Menakem's approach, known as Somatic Abolitionism, is a living embodied philosophy that demands endurance, stamina, discernment, and resilience – qualities he refers to as "doing the reps"[165] – for growth. Similar to the agapē ethic of Yeshua, Menakem imparts to his followers' key principles: We are not defective; we are enough; the fuel for our liberation lies within us, and we must transform and utilize it for our freedom; and once we embrace our whole selves, the divine within emerges, guiding us towards the peace and justice emphasized in biblical narratives.[166]

Thus, the genesis of the Black Church finds its roots in prophetic and political struggles for liberation and justice. However, the journey towards liberation entails profound internal and external conflicts. More than mere projects or calls, it requires a spirituality of resistance and renewed hope to persevere in the face of oppression.[167] By daring to stand up and gradually embodying a Christ-like agapē ethic, we can begin to deconstruct and reimagine our entrenched Royal Imagination into a Prophetic Imagination recognizing the divine within ourselves and others. Nonetheless, the Black Body and the Black Church have yet to fully embody the Prophetic agapē ethic due to lingering vestiges of colonialism.[168] Nevertheless, we must continue

[164] Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (Las Vegas, NV: Central Recovery Press, 2017); Ruth Terry, "On Becoming a Somatic Abolitionist," YES! Magazine, August 16, 2022, https://www.yesmagazine.org/issue/work/2022/08/16/somatic-abolitionist.

[165] Resmaa Menakem, "Somatic Abolitionism" Presented at the Omega Institute for Holistic Studies: Somatic Abolitionism Training, October 2022.

[166] Menakem, "Somatic Abolitionism," 2022.

[167] Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987).

[168] In the violent process of colonization, the minds of Black Bodies are colonized when these Bodies internalize their oppression, become diffident and self-denigrating, believe they are inferior to the colonizer, and acquiesce to their colonization with honor instead of seeing it as the vice of oppression. In ingesting colonization, we are fully exposed and susceptible to the dis-ease of White Body Privilege, and we align with White Bodies as a means of dealing with the dis-ease that we feel!

striving towards agapē embodiment, as the future is not a distant concept but a reality shaped by our present actions.[169] This prompts us to question why we, as the Black Body and the Black Church, continue to uphold and affirm a white-puritan-colonized faith system as the standard for worship.

Christian Culture / Black Culture

Another aspect of Bodiness regarding race is culture - race culture.[170] Culture, a notoriously difficult term to define because of the multifarious usages of the term, is a quality possessed by all people in all social groups. It is that complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by humanity as a member of society. Nonetheless, there is a certain aspect of uniqueness that the many and varied cultures of different Bodies or societies hold. As such, it is pertinent that one should never differentiate nor differentially valorize cultures as savage, barbaric, or civilized.[171] The cultural aspect of race is at the core of everybody's identity, and it is therefore innately at the core of a person's faith identity. In moving back to the start of AmeriKa, the plantation, the concept of race became directly tied to the species question. There is no identity that white bodies are that bodies of culture also are.[172] If we were to retrace AmeriKa's steps, we would find that the

[169] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2018), 34, 52.

[170] Zev M. Trachtenberg, *Making Citizens: Rousseau's Political Theory of Culture* (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2003), 249; Clyde Kluckhohn and Alfred Louis Kroeber, *Culture, a Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (Cambridge, MA: The Meseum, 1952: 181); Nancy J. Adler and Allison Gundersen, *International Dimensions of Organizational Behavior* (Mason, OH: Thomson South-Western, 1997), 14; Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups. The essential core of culture consists of traditional (historically derived and selected) products of actions on the other, as conditional elements of future actions.

[171] Kevin Avruch, *Culture & Conflict Resolution* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1998), 6-7.

[172] Menakem, "Somatic Abolitionism," 2022.

thirteen colonies were filled with Colonized White Bodies who were fleeing something that never got dealt with. Yet, in their flight, these White Bodies never experienced the same happenings as Black Bodies - at least not long term. And in building this "New Land," the Colonizers organized the "New World" by mimicking the same surf/king relationship they had experienced before their migration. Their imagination brought them back to a place of brutalization, and in their oppression, they learned both the victim's and the perpetrator's template. Thus, they formed AmeriKa's most enduring institutional structure, the plantation – the plantation-organized White Bodies!

In post-Plantation AmeriKa, pigmentocracy[173] determines what species you are. Wherever you go in this world, the darker the Bodies, the more you see monkey symbolism. Unfortunately, because of the weightiness of race on Black Bodies – the oppressed – the cultural appropriation of violence is a personal necessity and is not a method deliberately devised. It is the deep, instinctive expression of a human being denied individuality, and one's only rescue is through a conciliatory rebellion and revolution.[174] For me, the closest definition of culture broken down in a theological setting leans towards the understanding of Hofstede, which states that culture is the collective programming – basic shared assumptions, values, and beliefs – of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another Body.[175] It is this elusive term "culture," which both unites and fractionates Bodies and has a far-reaching impact on our everyday actions, thoughts, and belief systems. Consequently, all cultures are characterized by constant change and must adapt to environmental changes. This urgent

[173] Pigmentocracy overrides the distinctions of class, gender, religion, and ethnic origin, with members of the society using skin color as the most important parameter for judging other members of society.

[174] Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1966), 395.

[175] Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2001), 9.

desideratum for social change has given rise to global conflicts associated with ethnicity, religion, and ethical beliefs.

Additionally, this unseen culture

- Affects Perception: Our culture establishes and regulates the structure of our thinking, which manipulates our perceptions.
- Influences Behavior: Perceptions actuate and mold our behavior.
- Shapes Our Personalities: As a whole, humanity tends to follow herd mentality. Thus, for an individual – a Body – to be accepted as a part of the group, that Body tends to follow what the group decides for them. Hence, it is in the attempt to fulfill that herd mentality, that we shape ourselves to suit the Royal Imagination.

It is impossible for an individual growing up in a given community not to be indoctrinated into that particular culture's attitudes and beliefs – the way people are supposed to behave, look, and even think – even if they consciously resist such indoctrination. When this cultural appropriation happens collectively, as indeed it must whenever there is a collection of people, the development and progression of a culture inevitably occurs, as each person's attitudes and behaviors necessarily influence others' perceptions, as well as their attitudes and behaviors, which can be seen to have a cyclical effect.

Shift of Our Christianity

Colonization is the preamble to every injustice Black and Indigenous Bodies experience through White Body Privilege. Nearly six centuries ago, Pope Nicholas V charged the Holy Catholic Church with the Christian holy duty to enslave any and all non-Christian Bodies they encounter. The Pope's mandate would be the first recorded international edict granting a

Christian nation the authority to endorse, advance, enforce, and immeasurably profit in perpetuity from slave trading.[176] The AmeriKan Christianity was forged from the dung[177] of this country, and innately at the very heart of White Christianity is oppression. This oppressive Church-State, whose precedence is based on greed and self-interest, was at the center of the moral issue of enslavement and the school-to-prison pipeline. Thus, the cyclical effect of race and culture both birthed out of and contingent on the establishment and upkeep of the Plantation, has been imposed on the Black Church and Indigenous faith traditions. Furthermore, as seen within the experience of all of humanity, when a child is birthed, time must elapse prior to the commencement of individuation. Taking baby steps towards consciousness, the birthed Body can start to recognize another Body as such and is able to react with a smile, and it is years before the child ceases to confuse itself with the universe.[178] The Black Church persists in navigating its relationship with the White Church, often perceived as the arbiter of norms and values for non-White individuals and entities. Educational institutions, particularly those dedicated to theological education, serve dual roles: they facilitate the integration of younger generations into the prevailing societal paradigm, while also serving as a tool for fostering prophetic imagination aimed at liberation.

[176] Pius Onyemechi Adiele, *The Popes, the Catholic Church and the Transatlantic Enslavement of Black Africans 1418*-1839 (Volume 16), Library.oapen.org (Georg Olms Verlag, 2017), accessed January 27, 2021, https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/46336.

[177] Bible Hub, ed, "Strong's Greek: 4657. σκύβαλον (Skubalon) -- Refuse," *Biblehub.com*, last modified 2022, accessed August 10, 2022, https://biblehub.com/greek/4657.htm. σκύβαλον: the refuse, the filthy scraps of garbage, what is good-for-nothing except to be discarded (Philippians 3:8 NRSV).

[178] Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), 23, 28.

- In dealing with this binary within a theological setting, the Black Church raised under the guise of the - symbols: masculinity of god,[179] fatherskygod,[180] the toxic masculinity of god,[181] slavery's white christ,[182] whitemalegod[183] - must rediscover how to participate in the transformation of its world so that both physical Bodies and the Church Body can be jointly responsible for a process in which all grow, as the future is not something hidden, but something that is built intentionally with the use of the imagination.[184]

The division between man and woman,[185] Black and White, human and species, similarly ripped the AmeriKan Church into pieces. And in its brokenness over the question of species - the

[179] Cleveland, *God Is a Black Woman*, 2022. Many Christians have been programmed and therefore evangelized others with the notion that God is always near (Zephaniah 3:17 KJV; Matthew 1:22-23 MSG). But the *god* that many Oppressed Bodies experience and are convinced to trust is embedded in us from our progenitors, including AmeriKan Society - as seen at Church, stained-glass windows, on TV, US bills and coins, capitalistic economies.

[180] Cleveland, *God Is a Black Woman*, 2022. Fatherskygod references the distinctly patriarchal transcendent male god who only deals with spiritual matters, not physical matters, offering escape from the natural into the static peace of timelessness and freedom, detached from humanity except to dominate them. This fatherskygod is not present when Oppressed Bodies need the Most Divine's presence the most. However, fatherskygod did not always exist. Fatherskygod came into prominence during the Mesolithic period when Indo-Europeans invaded and colonized the global south.

[181] Cleveland, *God Is a Black Woman*, 2022. Male god is a patriarchal myth that attempts to declare that men are more sacred than women, non-binary, and gender-expansive Bodies, as male god's primary allegiance is with men and toxic masculinity. Masculinity only works when it is influenced by femininity. The positive feminine influence was removed in the creation narrative when the Serpent - seen throughout ancient history as the divine feminine and feminine wisdom - was transformed into a deceiver.

[182] Cleveland, *God Is a Black Woman*, 2022. Ancillary to God's maleness is the cultural imposition of God's whiteness. Furthermore, in Christianity, the preeminent conceptualization of God can be seen in the Body of Jesus Christ. The earliest image of Jesus Christ closely resembles God's embodiedness in Yeshua of Yehoshua, an Oppressed Body surrounded by Oppressed Bodies. Yeshua's context was not the commonplace example of the White Body Privilege Jesus of white supremacy depicted today. This hierarchy of race empowered slave-holding whites as superior to all other Bodies and closest to God. But White Bodies within the White Church encountered a moral dilemma in their participation in the enslavement of Black Human Bodies because Yeshua looked just like the enslaved people. Thus, White Bodies invented the *White Christ*, who made a statement about who God is and whom God cares about.

[183] Cleveland, *God Is a Black Woman*, 2022. White Male God continues to justify the oppression of Oppressed Bodies while dwelling among, identifying with, and protecting the power of white Bodies and cisgender men.

[184] Cleveland, "In God We Can't Trust: The Problem of Whitemalegod," in *God Is a Black Woman*, pp. 22-51; Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 34, 52.

[185] Menakem, *Somatic Abolitionism*, 2022. White Bodies - and specifically white cisgendered male Bodies - are the epitome of humanness, causing all other Bodies to be judged as only partially human, or as a different species.

questioning of if all Bodies are made in the image, likeness, and imitation of the Most Divine, and thereby all Bodies are divine as well – that AmeriKan Christianity's oppressive nature was cultivated. This oppressive Christianity has shaped AmeriKa's theological perspective, AmeriKa's view on Christ, AmeriKa's intolerance of diversity, and AmeriKa's view and tool on how to treat those who appear other than the preset standards for AmeriKan appearance. Cone, the founder of Black Liberation Theology, clearly diagnosed the problem, noting that:

> Racism is deeply embedded in American religion and society. We cannot get rid of it by forgetting the past and simply urging blacks and whites to develop a good will toward each other. Racism is a cancer. To get rid of this deadly disease requires radical surgery that cuts deep into not only the "body politic" but also the body of Christ.[186]

In the journey towards decolonization and the rejection of colonial ideologies, the Black Church must confront its historical complicity in furthering colonial agendas, thereby aiding colonialists and perpetuating the acceptance of colonization among both the oppressed and the colonized. Some of the ways in which the Black Church has inadvertently propagates colonialism mirrors the practices of the Christian religious groups involved in establishing the British colonies, following a model developed within the context of the Roman Empire. These include:[187]

- Legitimizing Colonial Ventures: Similar to Christian groups established during the British colonization period, the Black Church sometimes adopted the narrative that the colonizers brought "order, culture, and civilization" to colonized peoples.[188] This

[186] James H. Cone, *Malcolm & Martin & America: A Dream or A Nightmare* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 296.

[187] James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews, A History* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2001); Charles Matson Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013).

[188] Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2018).

narrative masked the exploitative nature of colonialism and legitimized acts of subjugation.

- Imposing Religious Supremacy: Paralleling the colonizers' imposition of their own cultural values, the Black Church occasionally endorsed the subjugation of one faith group by another. This involved imposing its own religious language, values, and culture upon other Christian denominations or non-Christian belief systems, often through forced conversion or persecution.[189] Mandating the enforcing of strict religious observance and mandating that Bodies who practice, evangelize, or proselytize a different Christianity or a non-Christian faith are sometimes persecuted.
- Enforcing Religious Conformity: Strict adherence to specific religious practices became mandatory, mirroring the rigid control exerted by colonial powers. Dissenters who practiced, evangelized, or proselytized alternative forms of Christianity or non-Christian faiths faced marginalization or persecution, replicating the suppression of diverse ideologies by colonial regimes.[190]
- Othering Non-Colonized Peoples: Similar to colonial narratives, the Black Church sometimes perpetuated the image of communities outside its sphere of influence as lacking "law, culture, and morals," justifying intervention and imposing its own standards.[191]
- Competition and Division: Like competing colonial powers, differing Christian groups within the Black Church occasionally viewed their interpretations as uniquely "correct"

[189] James Hal Cone, "Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Crisis of Black Theology." *The Journal of Religious Ethics 1.1* (1973): 3-42; C. Eric. Lincoln, "Black Theology and Liberation: Historicizing the Issues." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 40.3 (1972): 323-337.

[190] Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 2005.

[191] Mieke van der Linden, "Chapter 3: Imperium," In *The Acquisition of Africa (1870–1914)*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill | Nijhoff, 2016), 51-69, doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004321199_004.

and requiring protection from opposing viewpoints. This fueled internal rivalry and a desire for control, mirroring the power struggles among colonizers.[192]

- Economic Exploitation: The Black Church, on occasion, played a role in creating new markets for colonizers, promoting the expansion of their "way of life" beyond national borders and contributing to the economic exploitation of colonized populations.[193]
- Conflating Piety with Subjugation: The association of piety and virtue with compliance and loyalty to the dominant faith community mirrored the colonial narrative that linked obedience to the colonizer with morality and civilization.[194]

By critically examining these historical entanglements with colonialism, the Black Body and the Black Church can move forward with greater clarity and authenticity on its decolonization journey.

Within the tapestry of Christian history, African contributions hold undeniable significance. Although the African diaspora has demonstrably embraced Christianity with remarkable fervor, the very roots of this faith can be traced back to African soil long before it touched Anglo-Saxon lands. Africa stands not only as a vibrant contemporary center of Christianity, but also as one of its earliest cradles. The unique coexistence of Christianity with Islam and traditional African religions within this rich landscape has arguably served to deepen the openness and conviction of the faithful. Moreover, both the Gospels themselves and modern archaeological discoveries reveal the presence of African adherents to "a Way," a movement demonstrably influenced by the teachings of Yeshua of Yehoshua. To delve deeper into this rich history, we will embark on a multifaceted investigation examining both individuals and broader

[192] Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022).
[193] Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press,1972).
[194] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1963.

theological landscapes. Through the lens of the Gospels, we will encounter figures each offering unique perspectives on early Christianity's African roots. Additionally, we will explore the writings and contributions of prominent Christian Intellectual Forebears. Together, these examinations shed light on the diverse and profound impact Africa has had on the development and understanding of Christianity.

Simon of Cyrene is one such figure, and although details surrounding Simon of Cyrene remain scarce, theologians and scholars have drawn powerful interpretations from his brief appearance in the Gospels, using him as a potent symbol of compassion and solidarity with the marginalized. Simon of Cyrene comes from modern-day Libya, a trade coastal outpost and colony of the Roman Empire, holding many Jewish settlers.[195] According to the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke, Simon was in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. Further enriching this interpretation is your observation that Simon hailed from Cyrenaica, a Roman colony with Jewish settlers, and was present in Jerusalem during significant religious events. This detail suggests his familiarity with diverse communities and potential openness to Yeshua's message, potentially supporting interpretations of him as a bridge between groups and a champion for inclusivity.[196] Simon of Cyrene holds significance in both liberation theology and process theology due to his role in the crucifixion narrative, which embodies key themes in these theological frameworks. In liberation theology, Simon's forced participation in carrying Yeshua's cross is interpreted as a symbol of solidarity with the oppressed and marginalized. This act underscores the idea of bearing one another's burdens and standing with those who suffer

[195] Richard Neff, *Simon of Cyrene: The Cross-Bearer's Legacy: A Story of the Faith and the Trials of Early Christians* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2013), x, http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=none&isbn=9781449795207.

[196] Charles Joshua Parrott, "Simon of Cyrene," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

unjustly. As Gustavo Gutiérrez, a prominent figure in liberation theology, writes, "Simon's involuntary participation in the crucifixion event highlights the call for active solidarity with the oppressed, embodying the imperative to 'take up the cross' in the struggle for liberation."[197] Simon's encounter with Yeshua reflects the broader theological emphasis on God's preferential option for the poor and oppressed, as articulated by liberation theologians such as Boff and Cone.[198]

In process theology, Simon's role can be understood in light of the concept of divine suffering and solidarity with the world, emphasizing the idea of God's dynamic engagement with the world, wherein God experiences the joys and sorrows of creation. Simon's involvement in carrying the cross exemplifies the notion of God's willingness to share in human suffering and participate in the ongoing process of redemption and transformation. As Cobb observes, "Simon's act of bearing the cross with Yeshua symbolizes God's enduring presence and empathetic involvement in the struggles of humanity."[199] Simon's encounter with Yeshua thus becomes a theological metaphor for God's empathetic response to human suffering and the divine call to participate in the work of justice and reconciliation.

Apollos, hailing from Alexandria, Egypt, embodies the vibrant Hellenistic Jewish context within early Christianity. While initially familiar with John the Baptist's teachings, his encounter with Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18: 24-28 NRSV) equipped him with a deeper understanding of Yeshua's message. This transformative experience highlights the importance of ongoing learning and dialogue, central tenets of process theology.[200] Moreover, Apollos' fluency in both Jewish

[197] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 1973.
[198] Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis Epistemological Foundation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009); James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 1969.
[199] Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 1999.
[200] Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 1999.

and Greek traditions made him a valuable bridge between diverse communities, advocating for inclusivity within the early church.[201] This aligns with liberation theology's emphasis on dismantling societal structures that exclude and empower marginalized groups.[202] In Acts 18: 24-28, Apollos fervently proclaims the message of Yeshua, although initially lacking a complete understanding of the Christian faith. He receives further instruction from Priscilla and Aquila, equipping him with a deeper understanding of Yeshua's message, thereby enabling him to more accurately teach about Yeshua. Apollos' journey illustrates the importance of theological education and the ongoing process of learning and growth in faith.[203] Moreover, Apollos' fluency in both Jewish and Greek traditions made him a valuable bridge between diverse communities, advocating for inclusivity within the early church. This narrative aligns with Yeshua's command to walk in agapē love, emphasizing the empowerment of marginalized communities through education and theological reflection and the call to dismantle societal structures that exclude and subjugate marginalized groups.[204]

The Ethiopian Eunuch, a representative of multiple marginalized identities, a high-ranking official in the court of the Queen of Ethiopia, and a seeker of knowledge, encountered Philip on his journey home from Jerusalem (Acts 8: 26-40 NRSV). Despite these societal barriers, he is drawn to the message of the prophet Isaiah and seeks understanding. Through Philip's guidance, the Ethiopian Eunuch receives baptism and is welcomed into the Christian

[201] Patrick J. Hartin, "Who Is Apollos?" in *Apollos Paul's Partner or Rival?* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), pp. 1-6; Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 1997.

[202] Enrique D. Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation: In the Age of Globalization and Exclusion*, trans. Alejandro A. Vallega (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

[203] Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 1999.

[204] Enrique D. Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation: In the Age of Globalization and Exclusion*, trans. Alejandro A. Vallega (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

community.[205] His conversion and subsequent return to Ethiopia mark a pivotal moment in the spread of Christianity beyond the traditional Jewish world. This narrative exemplifies the inclusive nature of Christianity, wherein individuals of all backgrounds are invited to participate fully in the life of the church.[206] The Ethiopian Eunuch's story is a symbol of hope and liberation for marginalized communities, particularly those facing racial and ethnic discrimination. Moreover, the Eunuch's receptiveness to new knowledge and his willingness to share it with his community contributed to the dynamic evolution of faith.[207] Apollos' and The Ethiopian Eunuch's stories highlight the role of individuals from diverse backgrounds in spreading the message of liberation and justice.

The Enduring Influence of Early Church Fathers on Christian Thought

The discovery of ancient churches in Ethiopia, dating back to the 4th century, underscores the historical presence and significant contributions of African Christianity to the development of theological thought. Thus, our Christian intellectual forebears, African Bodies, were prolific and plentiful amongst the framers of Christian faith, history, and theology.[208]

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[205] Sean D. Burke "Introduction." In *Queering the Ethiopian Eunuch: Strategies of Ambiguity in Acts*, 1–18. 1517 Media, 2013. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt22h6s0c.3. Here is a biblical character who seems to embody multiple differences of religion, class, race, gender, and sexuality as well. Comprehensive examination of the Ethiopian traveler's place in ancient society in relation to standard categories uncovers a fascinating, multifaceted character who defies easy classification.

[206] Carlton Pearson, *The Gospel of Inclusion: Reaching Beyond Religious Fundamentalism to the True Love of God and Self* (New York, NY: Atria Books, 2009).

[207] Carlton Pearson, *God Is Not a Christian, Nor a Jew, Muslim, Hindu: God Dwells with Us, in Us, Around Us, as Us* (New York, NY: Atria Books, 2010); Elisabeth Fiorenza Schüssler, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999).

[208] Alister E. McGrath and Gi-Chun So, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought (*Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013); Andrew Lawler, "Church Unearthed in Ethiopia Rewrites the History of Christianity in Africa," *Smithsonian Magazine* (Smithsonian Institution, December 10, 2019), https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/church-unearthed-ethiopia-rewrites-history-christianity-africa-180973740/.

Among these influential figures, Tertullian of Carthage stands out as the creator of Latin Christian theological language. Known for his extensive writings on theological matters, Tertullian's apologetics against paganism and Judaism, along with his polemical works, significantly contributed to the establishment of Christian doctrine and the Christian way of life. Thus, his theological contributions indirectly resonated with later movements like liberation and process theology. During his time, Tertullian defended the persecuted Christian community against Roman authorities, highlighting his work "Ad Scapulam" (To the Scapular Ones) because he believed in the concept of humanity as made in the image and likeness of the imago Dei, that all members of the human family.[209] This focus on resistance against oppressive power structures finds parallels in liberation theology's critique of unjust social systems.

Similarly, Cyprian of Carthage, originally a rhetorician and lawyer, converted to Christianity and became a prolific writer on topics concerning the unity of the Church and orthodoxy. His works played a crucial role in shaping early Christian thought and practice. "He who does not hold fast to this unity of the Church does not hold fast to the law of God, does not hold fast to the faith of the Father and the Son, who says, 'They were two, but they shall be one flesh.' And again: 'That they may be all one, even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.'"[210] In process theology, Cyprian's influence is evident in his theological approach to ecclesiology and his understanding of the Church as a dynamic and evolving body. Cyprian's emphasis on the ongoing transformation and adaptation of the Church in response to changing historical circumstances aligns with process theology's emphasis on the creative advance of reality and the co-creative role of individuals and communities in shaping the

[209] William M. Reeve, "The Apology, Translated by Wm. Reeve, (1709 Reprinted 1889)," Tertullian, November 2001, https://www.tertullian.org/articles/reeve_apology.htm.

[210] Caecilius Cyprianus, *The Lapsed: The Unity of the Catholic Church*, trans. Maurice Bévenot (New York, NY: The Newman Press, 1957), 49.).

future. Cyprian acknowledged: "We are not ashamed to acknowledge... that we learn... in the fear of God and... with the progress of faith and grace, we go forward to what is better and more useful."[211]

Athanasius of Alexandria, recognized as the "Father of Christian orthodoxy,"[212] significantly influenced the early church's Trinitarian theology. His "homoousion" ("of the same substance") argument at the Council of Nicaea (325 AD) affirmed the full divinity of Christ, alongside the Father and the Holy Spirit, thus establishing the foundation for Trinitarian doctrine.[213] Athanasius' emphasis on the unity of the Godhead and the full divinity of Christ laid a foundation for subsequent theological developments. In the context of liberation theologies, Athanasius' insistence on the divinity of Christ has been instrumental, as it demonstrates Yeshua as the liberator of the marginalized and destitute, for it is Christ's divinity that is the source of liberation.[214] Moreover, Process theologians, such as Whitehead and Hartshorne, have engaged with Athanasius' emphasis on divine immanence and the dynamic nature of God's relationship with creation.[215] Athanasius' insistence on the inseparable union of the divine and the human in Christ evidences God's continual interaction with the evolving world, shaping its ongoing becoming.[216]

Plausibly the most influential theologian and philosopher in the history of Christianity, Augustine of Hippo's influence is profound and multifaceted. His theological works, particularly his emphasis on the nature of sin, grace, and the human condition, have significantly informed

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[211] Everett Ferguson, *Church History, Volume One: From Christ to the Pre-Reformation: The Rise and Growth of the Church in Its Cultural, Intellectual, and Political Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013).

[212] Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1993).

[213] Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 1993.

[214] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 1973.

[215] David F. Ford and Rachel Muers, eds., *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

[216] Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 1999.

both process and liberation theological movements. Liberation theologians, such as Gustavo Gutiérrez and Jon Sobrino, draw on Augustine's understanding of sin and grace to frame their critique of social injustice and oppression: "Sin manifests itself not only in personal acts of individuals, but also in social structures and mechanisms that generate injustice, marginalization, and oppression. But, hope is the seed of liberation[217] Augustine's recognition of the structural sin inherent in social systems aligns with liberation theology's focus on advocating for the marginalized and oppressed.[218] Moreover, Augustine's influence can be seen in Process Theology, as scholars, such as Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne, engage with Augustine's ideas on divine action and the nature of God's presence in the world.[219] Overall, Augustine's intellectual legacy continues to shape theological discourse in diverse ways, providing rich theological resources for engaging with contemporary issues and questions.

Origen of Alexandria, alive during a time of little doctrinal consensus, emerged as a pivotal figure as one of the first theologians to offer an alternative Christian system amidst the speculative mythological systems of various Christian sects, Origen's impact is profound. His writings centralize the notion that God's providence aims to restore all souls to their original blessedness, even suggesting the potential for the repentance and salvation of Satan's soul.[220] Origen's emphasis on the universal salvific will of God, inclusive of all beings, resonates deeply with liberation theologians who advocate for the liberation of the oppressed and marginalized. Moreover, his concept of apokatastasis, the ultimate restoration of all things, has influenced

[217] Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach*, Translated by John Drury (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002); Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988).

[218] Augustine, *The Confessions: With an Introduction and Contemporary Criticism*, ed. David Vincent Meconi (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2012).

[219] Augustine, *The Confessions*, 2012; Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 1999.

[220] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 1970.

process theologians who envision a God actively involved in the ongoing process of creating, transforming, and redeeming the world.[221] By exploring the themes of universal reconciliation and divine providence, Origen's theological insights continue to shape contemporary theological discourse in both liberation and process theology.[222]

Archaeological finds in Ethiopia, highlight the discovery of what is believed to be the earliest Christian church on the continent of Africa. This Church was built around 313, when Roman Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity.[223] Though Christianity later became preponderant in Europe and America, the assertion that it is a White man's religion is neither historically accurate nor theologically correct. Thus we – Oppressed Bodies and the Black Church – must interrogate how we can remove the colonial lens of puritan theology, empirical systems as they relate the Christian principles, and racial and gender oppression as they relate the Christian principles. My belief is that our interrogation will show us that we can do this by leaning into Holy Scriptures and, in particular, in this setting, the teachings and actions of Yeshua. Remember, as it was written, unlike other ancient books, the Bible was not the literature of a major, regional, or ruling class. Alternatively, the Bible was written to uplift the minor, remote, oppressed members of society as the literature for the critics of Bodies to hold a Royal Imagination. These oppressed Bodies refused to accept their world as it was. They knew inexorably in their souls that although their oppressor used *God* to sustain their oppression, their

[221] Origen, *Origen: On First Principles*, trans. John Behr (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019); William E. Kaufman, "Apocatastasis in Whitehead's Process Thought." *Process Studies: An International Journal of Whiteheadian Scholarship3* 32, no. 1 (2003): 44–60.

[222] Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2017); Gary S. Shogren, "The Universality of Christ's Redemption: A Study in Pauline Theology," PhD diss., University of Manchester, 2012.

[223] Andrew Lawler, "Church Unearthed in Ethiopia Rewrites the History of Christianity in Africa," *Smithsonian Magazine* (Smithsonian Institution, December 10, 2019), https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/church-unearthed-ethiopia-rewrites-history-christianity-africa-180973740/.

ancestors and the spiritual beliefs of the past did not match what they were being indoctrinated with. Thus, they went into their Prophetic Imagination to conceive a reformed theological belief system set on political dissent, social justice, and hope.[224]

Today, much of what passes for as gospel propagation actually equates to acts of oppression, the evangelistic impulse to spread the good news and save everyone's soul while contemporaneously dismissing oppressed bodies, along with their land or their dignity.[225] Thus, during the violent process of colonization Black Bodies and Black Bodies of Faith internalize and embody their oppression, become diffident and self-denigrating, believe they are inferior to the colonizer, and acquiesce to their colonization viewing it with honor instead of seeing it as the vice of oppression fashioned in the depths of hell. The antithesis of the colonized mind is the decolonized mind. The only means by which the Black Church can actively move further towards liberation today is by moving to decolonize the Black Church.[226] This decolonization, which sets out to change the theological order in the implementation of the Word, is a historical process which cannot take place unnoticed: that is to say it cannot be understood, it cannot become intelligible nor clear to itself except in the exact measure that we can discern the movements which give it historical form and content. Decolonization is the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature, putting into practice the word of the parable of the Vineyard "the last will be first, and the first will be last, for many are called, but few are

[224] Amos Elon, *Jerusalem: Battlegrounds of Memory* (New York, NY: Kodansha International, 1995), 19.

[225] Mark Van Steenwyk, David Fitch, and Jin Kim, *The Unkingdom of God Embracing the Subversive Power of Repentance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 24.

[226] Andrea Smith, "Decolonization in Unexpected Places: Native Evangelicalism and the Rearticulation of Mission." *American Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (2010): 569–90. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40983420. Decolonization is the intelligent, calculated, and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and/or exploitation of your minds, bodies, and lands, and it is engaged for the ultimate purpose of overturning the colonial structure and realizing Indigenous liberation . . . But make no mistake: Decolonization ultimately requires the overturning of the colonial structure. It is not about tweaking the existing colonial system to make it more Indigenous-friendly or a little less oppressive. The existing system is fundamentally and irreparably flawed.

chosen (Matthew 20:16 NRSV footnote of other ancient authorities added)" – a calling of the colonial plight into question and resisting against the colonial structure of subjugation.[227]

An inquisition towards decolonization cannot easily be implanted onto pre-existing dogma, doctrine, and disquisitions, even if they are critical frameworks by which we – the Black Church and Black Bodies – have started a trickle towards justice rolling down like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24 NRSV). The main source of resistance to theological inquiry – a move further into the love ethic of Yeshua – is fear. The refusal to make any improvement, lest we should be guilty of change can only be overcome by holding our minds open to receive the rays of truth and changing our views and language and practice as often and as fast as we can obtain increasing knowledge.[228] The question then is, how can we – the Black Church and Black Bodies – continue this move in stepping further into decolonization?

One of the first steps that the Body of God can take toward the decolonization of the Black Church – the Holy Catholic Church[229] – is to parallel the prophetic theological imagination of our enslaved and oppressed ancestors. No theology is not nor has not been shaped by the context of the Body of believers. In our indigenous land of Africa, our ancestors worshiped a thousand gods with a thousand names.[230] And, with the whitemalegod with which they were indoctrinated within AmeriKa, these oppressed Bodies took the partial knowledge by which their enslavers indoctrinated them – a Christianity that upheld a proslavery theology and considered

[227] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York, N.Y.: Grove Press, 2021), 36-37.

[228] Charles Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology*, ed. Anthony Uyl (Ontario, Canada: DEVOTED Publishing, 2018), 11.

[229] Justo L. González, *The Apostles' Creed for Today* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 76-77, 79. The Church is an essential part of the Creed because it is within the church, a communal space the Body of God universal can experience faith in the midst of varying theologies, traditions, and polities.

[230] Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2010), 153.

them to be a different species of being – and used that doctrine denude of any form of justice for the poor and oppressed, to find a path towards liberation. These Bodies, whose very species were questioned, reshaped this embedded Puritan Christian tradition as they had a need to live into their inner divinity. Made by the oppressors' Royal Theological Imagination to be insignificant, as if smaller than a quark, and unrelatable to any system of being which could give meaning and direction to the individual oppressed Body and the communal oppressed Body, these Bodies had to step deep into their prophetic theological imagination. This was done by holding liberative secret and invisible spiritual services that embraced Christianity in their own image, to satisfy their own spiritual practices and needs. They took the Royal God, and the ancestors, to a place to experience joy and peace and comfort.[231]

Experiencing Clean Pain

For the purpose of this dissertation, clean pain encapsulates the suffering we experience when we consciously choose integrity over fear. It arises from confronting difficult truths about ourselves, the world surrounding us, and even our deeply held theological beliefs. This confrontation is not passive; it compels us to actively engage in healing and personal growth in response. Essentially, clean pain involves making the decision to confront discomfort and engage in challenging situations, steadfastly refusing to resort to unhealthy coping mechanisms as escape routes. Once again as a body, the Body of God must shift further from the ethic of salvation to an ethic of liberation. Yeshua came to bring liberation to the othered and oppressed, and that is the mantle the Body of God it's called to embody. In stepping into his divinity,

[231] Henry Louis Gates Jr, *The Black Church: This Is Our Story, This Is Our Song* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2021), 16, https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/lib/dtl/reader.action?docID=6463324&ppg=34.

eighty- five percent of what Yeshua of Yehoshua – Jesus – taught was not in the Torah. Rather, in looking past the Torah as a means of experiencing increasing knowledge, Yeshua used his own human experience and social context, as a member of the Outsider and Oppressed Body of God and his relationship with God to catechize and demonstrate his agapē ethic, a reimagined way of being.

The question Black Bodies and the Black Church individually and communally must ask themselves is: is our faith in alignment with the teachings of Yeshua of Yehoshua, Jesus the *Tektōn*, Yeshua the Messiah? When considering the doctrine that has shaped our understanding of Christianity, the institutionalization of the Yeshua movement comes from a Constantinian call for proper Creedal language that could be used to establish one Christian doctrine. A tool that Constantine and the Pax Romana created to solidify, bolster, and proselytize their Royal Imagination. The Nicene Creed is responsible for the establishment of Yeshua of Yehoshua – Jesus of Nazareth – as Divine. The premise of Christian theology and doctrine, created over three hundred years after the time of Yeshua' death by the very empire which persecuted the followers of "*the* Way," is a perverted take on the agapē ethic of the Yeshua movement – the belief system lived out by Yeshua. Since the third century, most Christians have been indoctrinated with a God that is tied to the Royal Imagination: dominant, full of power, and far off from humanity – especially the oppressed and othered members of society. But the man Yeshua did not portray God in this way.

Throughout Yeshua's life, as found in the Biblical narrative, Yeshua was in relation with a God who, in the book of Genesis, played in the dirt, breathed into, and walked with their creation (Genesis 2: 7, 19, 21-22; 3:8 NRSV). This example left by Yeshua, of God being relational, is a key anchor to which oppressed Bodies held onto in the past and can continue to

keep holding onto. As the God of Yeshua was relational, full of grace, and open to exploring a shared divinity with earthly Bodies, liberation from oppression could be found within the Body of God. After all, Yeshua, a preeminent example of the Most Divine of earth was an impoverished, destitute, and oppressed laborer. This is why the movement of the Way was about liberation of oppressed Bodies. After all, in one of Yeshua's last meetings with the members of the Way, Yeshua reminded them that they were in the same covenantal relationship with God as he himself was. In his prayer, Yeshua reminded God, the present Body of God, and the Future Body of God, that they all have the same relational relationship:

> As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them (John 17: 20-24 NRSV).

Thus, what the Black Church and oppressed Bodies of God must once again do in following the tenets of what Yeshua teaches and practices by deconstructing what currently exists and reimagining a new way of being that more closely aligns with the agapē love ethic that Yeshua demonstrated and experienced. The demonstration and embodiment of the kin-dom[232] of God – heaven – brought down to earth. We are in the midst of a call to deconstruct and reconstruct a reimagined doctrine and theology of liberation out of the current knowledge and time we are in. We must start by asking questions about what we have been told and by asking what Yeshua had asked of those who wanted to be his disciples in the past: "What's written in

[232] For this dissertation, the term "kin-dom" signifies a deliberate theological stance that prioritizes the dismantling of oppressive structures and the formation of communities rooted in justice, equality, and shared responsibility. Ultimately, it emphasizes liberation from all forms of domination.

God's Law? *How do you interpret it* (Luke 10:26 MSG)?" Let us begin with a critique of power because this is what Yeshua had called us to do in order to move further into the ethics of *a Way*.[233] I believe that by further answering the question of how we interpret scripture as those called to continue the movement of "*a* Way;" this doctoral project can help the Black Church to tap into their theological imagination and return to the Gospel as lived by Yeshua of Nazareth, therefore helping it to be decolonized.

[233] First Corinthian Baptist Church, NYC, "Empowering Conversations: Christianity at the Crossroads," *www.youtube.com* (YouTube, 2022), last modified 2022, accessed October 31, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcAL4i10J7A&t=1s.

Chapter III

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The glaring disconnects between the Black Church's colonial practices and the agapē love espoused by Yeshua ignited my passion for this Doctor of Ministry project entitled "Clean Pain: Decolonizing the Black Church a Reconciliatory Path." My theological journey at New York Theological Seminary, steeped in Liberation and Process Theology, further fueled my ardor for the decolonization and reconciliation of the Black Body and the Black Church.

Decolonization, Reconstruction, and the Future of Faith

The term "Black Church"[234] encapsulates an institution of profound significance within the societal fabric, characterized by its origins in the collective experiences, struggles, and triumphs of marginalized communities, particularly those historically oppressed on the basis of race, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Transcending mere physical sanctuary, The Black Church embodies a dynamic faith community forged in the crucible of shared oppression and marginalization. It emerges as a living tapestry, woven from the fibers of Indigenous ancestral spirits and the stolen threads of Christianity, reimagined by Black Bodies into a defiant anthem of faith, ingenuity, resistance, and resilience. This sacred space resonates with spiritual expression, communal solidarity, and resistance against systemic injustices. It reverberates with the thunderous sermons of liberation theologians such as James Cone, who reconceptualized Blackness not as a pigment but as a shared experience of marginalization, a community bound by

[234] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 1997; Eddie S. Glaude, *An Uncommon Faith: A Pragmatic Approach to the Study of African American Religion* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2018).; Anthony B. Pinn, "The Black Church and Hip Hop Culture: Toward Bridging a Generation Divide," *Choice Reviews Online* 49, no. 11 (July 1, 2012), https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.49-6219; Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 2005).

the unwavering pursuit of human dignity and a fervent quest for justice.[235] But the Black Church transcends the traditional ecclesiastical boundaries of pews and sermons, spilling onto the streets like "a mighty flood (Amos 5:24 NLT)," seeking social transformation and ardently advocating for liberation and empowerment of those marginalized by societal structures. As a testament to the enduring legacy of resilience and faith in the face of adversity, the Black Church serves as a beacon of sanctuary, empowerment, and prophetic voice in the ongoing struggle for equality and justice.

Reconciliation of the Black Body and the Black Church – through *agapē* and social justice – became my core conviction, shaping a nuanced understanding of sin and salvation as colonization and reconciliation, respectively. This transformative journey, encapsulated by the concept of acquiring and sharing the divine Self, led me to challenge my own synthetic faith and I identified colonialism as the root cause of the Black Bodies disconnect from divine wholeness. My dissertation dives deep into these themes, deconstructing the Black Body and the Black Church through a decolonial lens and seeking a non-colonized, reconciliatory faith system.

What is decolonization and what does it mean in terms of the black church?

Numerous prominent theologians within Process, Liberation, Womanist, and Queer traditions bolster my perspective regarding the pervasive influence of colonialism as the underpinning of the world order, that the world is deeply interwoven with colonial foundations.[236] Similarly, critiques from various theological perspectives highlight the

[235] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 1970.

[236] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 1989; Cobb, *Transforming Christianity and the World*, 1999; Gary J. Dorrien, *Imperial Designs: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013); Gary J. Dorrien, "'the Theological and the Political in Christianity, Socialism, and Modernity' by Gary

entanglement of the Church Universal with colonial and imperial structures. Consequently, these assertions lend credence to my proposition that the inception of the Black Church is rooted in the expansionist and imperialistic womb,[237] as it too has been ensnared by the Constantinian shift.[238] Accordingly, believers were, and still are, taught more about the way of Whiteness than the way of Jesus.[239] In the violent process of colonization, the minds of Black Bodies are colonized when these Bodies internalize their oppression, become diffident and self-denigrating, believe they are inferior to the colonizer and acquiesce to their colonization with honor instead of seeing it as the vice of oppression.[240] In ingesting colonization, we are fully exposed and susceptible to the "dis-

Dorrien," Canopy Forum, August 2, 2023, https://canopyforum.org/2021/06/15/the-theological-and-the-political-in-christianity-socialism-and-modernity/.

[237] This metaphorical expression signifies an acknowledgment of the historical context from which the Black church emerged. Its development was intricately connected to the overarching systems of imperialism, expansionism, and colonialism prevalent during the eras of European colonization and the slave trade in the Americas. Moreover, it denotes that the establishment and growth of the Black church transpired within a socio-political framework defined by oppressive colonial powers and their exploitative agendas. Within this context, the institution served as both a locus of resistance and adaptation for Black communities amidst systemic oppression.

[238] David Ray Griffin, *Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism A Process Philosophy of Religion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).; John B. Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & stock publishers, 1998). The Constantinian shift, marked by Constantine's conversion and Christianity's rise to a state religion, had profound consequences for the Church's future. Entwined with the ruling class, the Church now served to maintain existing social structures, ultimately transforming the gospel's message of liberation into a tool for the powerful.

[239] Cleveland, *God Is a Black Woman*, 2022; Resmaa Menakem, *The Quaking of America: An Embodied Guide to Navigating Our Nation's Upheaval and Racial Reckoning* (Las Vegas, NV: Central Recovery Press, 2022). Seminary education, despite its potential for critical reflection and liberationist theological frameworks, often remains entangled with the historical foundations of American society, which are deeply rooted in the plantation system and its attendant racialized power structures.

[240] Lianne Mulder, "Frantz Fanon, Internalized Oppression and the Decolonization of Education," Academia.edu, March 19, 2016, https://www.academia.edu/23462879/Frantz_Fanon_Internalized_Oppression_and_the_Decolonization_of_Education; Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2018; Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2008). The persistence of 'colonial neurosis,' as described by Franz Fanon, and the ongoing struggle against internalized subjugation highlight the lasting consequences of "internal colonization" inflicted by White Body Privilege. Addressing this internalized oppression remains crucial for achieving full liberation.

ease"[241] of White Body Privilege,[242] and we align with White Bodies as a means of dealing with the dis-ease that we feel!

The Body Politic: Colonialism as a System of Theological and Material Oppression

Colonization is not a one-time event but a perpetual daily happening. And the difficulty of defining colonialism stems from the fact that the term is often used as a synonym for imperialism. Colonialism is defined as "control by one power over a dependent area or people."[243] It occurs when one nation subjugates another, conquering its population and exploiting it, often while forcing its own language and cultural values upon its people. Gottwald similarly defines colonialism as control by one controlling entity over a dependent area or people. An example of colonialism can be found when one sovereign nation subjugates another, extending its borders into both contiguous and noncontiguous areas while conquering and exploiting the subjugated population to increase their own power justifying their conquests by asserting their legal and religious obligation to take over the land and culture of the "Black" indigenous Bodies.[244] Additionally, it is important to demonstrate that colonialism is not a modern phenomenon. World history is full of examples of one society gradually expanding by incorporating adjacent territory and settling its people on newly conquered territory.

[241] Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, "The History of 'Disease': Lacking in Ease," Merriam-Webster, 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/wordplay/word-history-of-disease; Oxford University Press, "Ease Noun," Oxford University Dictionary, 2023, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/ease_n?tab=meaning_and_use.

[242] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 2017. In this dissertation, I am defining White Body Privilege as the unearned benefits and advantages conferred upon individuals perceived and treated as "White" within a racialized society. This privilege encompasses systemic advantages, opportunities, and protections that accrue to individuals solely by virtue of their perceived whiteness, often at the expense of marginalized racial groups.

[243] Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, "Colonialism Definition & Meaning," Merriam-Webster, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/colonialism.

[244] Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh*, 1979.

Exodus and Conquest

To demonstrate the vastness and deep hold that colonialism has on human culture, I first wanted to share some demonstrated instances of colonialism within sacred texts. While the Exodus from Egypt signifies liberation in the Bible, the ensuing conquest of Canaan described in the Book of Joshua raises complex questions about colonization.[245] The narrative depicts the Israelites, newly free from bondage, displacing, dispossessing, and dehumanizing the Canaanite inhabitants of the land explicitly promised to them by God reinforcing the notion of rightful ownership and entitlement. The Book of Joshua depicts this conquest as brutal, with cities destroyed and inhabitants often slaughtered or enslaved. While some interpretations view the Canaanite conquest in Joshua 1-12 as a unique historical event or emphasize its theological significance without endorsing colonial motives, others, like me, find it troublingly reminiscent of historical patterns of territorial expansionism. This perspective aligns with Harvey Cox's call for "liberating hermeneutics" in biblical interpretation, urging us to re-imagine the way we read the Bible by moving beyond literalist readings and embracing a more nuanced understanding of scripture that acknowledges its complex layers of meaning and engaging with the text's socio-political context and critically questioning potential colonial undertones. Through Walter Brueggemann's lens of "divine advocacy," the narrative appears to contradict God's role as protector of the vulnerable, raising concerns about claims of Israelite superiority and

[245] Here are three examples of colonialism found in the Book of Joshua: First, God instructs Joshua to conquer and occupy the land of Canaan, promising victory and driving out the existing inhabitants (Joshua 1:1-5 NRSV). The text also describes the systematic destruction of entire Canaanite cities and their populations after military campaigns (Joshua 10:40-43 NRSV). Moreover, we read detailed descriptions of territorial boundaries and cities assigned to each tribe to illustrate the establishment of Israelite dominance in the region (Joshua 18-19 NRSV).

justifications for violence against the Canaanites.[246] Notably, passages like "the destruction of Jericho in Joshua 6,"[247] "the conquest of the entire land in Joshua 11,"[248] and "the condemnation of mixed marriages and Canaanite practices in Joshua 23"[249] echo colonial rhetoric of divine mandate and ethnic entitlement, prompting a critical reading that challenges unchallenged claims of righteous land acquisition. While acknowledging alternate interpretations, Brueggemann's emphasis on prophetic critique encourages us to view the conquest not as divinely sanctioned conquest, but as a complex narrative requiring critical engagement with its potentially colonial subtexts. Moreover, Brueggemann's exploration of prophetic critique in "The Prophetic Imagination" and "Divine Presence Amid Violence: Contextualizing the Book of Joshua" provides a framework for understanding resistance to imperial ideologies and the subversion of oppressive systems within biblical narratives. in reading the exodus narrative with new eyes, I cannot help but recognize that this divinely sanctioned conquest mirrors historical patterns of colonial expansion, where a dominant group justifies its territorial acquisition through claims of

[246] Cox, *How to Read the Bible*, 2015; Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1997; Walter Brueggemann, *Divine Presence Amid Violence: Contextualizing the Book of Joshua* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009).

[247] Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh*, 1979. "They put everything in the city under the holy curse, killing man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey (Joshua 6:21 MSG)." The conquest of Jericho exemplifies a violent colonial strategy aimed at eradicating indigenous populations to assert territorial control, thereby highlighting its role in the subjugation of Canaanite inhabitants and emphasizing its colonial implications.

[248] Michael David Coogan, ed., *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001). "Joshua took the whole region. He did everything that God had told Moses. Then he parceled it out as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribes (Joshua 11:23 MSG)." This passage symbolizes the completion of Israel's conquest of Canaan under Joshua's leadership, reflecting the colonial ideology of territorial expansion and dominance. The analysis of the colonial dimensions of Joshua's conquest emphasizes its role in consolidating Israelite control over indigenous territories.

[249] Norman Gottwald, "The Israelite Conquest of Canaan: Colonial Analogy and Political Repression," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 44, no. 1 (1976): 12–29. "For the Lord has driven out before you great and strong nations, and as for you, no one has been able to withstand you to this day. For if you turn back and join the survivors of these nations, know assuredly that the Lord your God will not continue to drive out these nations before you (Joshua 23: 6-13 NRSV)." Joshua warns the Israelites against intermarriage and adopting Canaanite customs. This emphasis on ethnic purity and separation evokes colonial anxieties about "miscegenation" and cultural contamination, while also promoting exclusionary practices and contributing to the silencing and dispossession of Canaanite cultures.

superiority and divine mandate (Joshua 1-12 NRSV).

Canaanite Influence

Further, the biblical texts prescribing the displacement or assimilation of Canaanite culture – Black Bodies – enshrined in Deuteronomy 20, raise uncomfortable questions about cultural colonialism. By demanding the destruction of Canaanite religious sites and the potential absorption of their practices, these verses can be seen as advocating for the suppression of a distinct cultural identity in favor of Imperial dominance.[250] This raises concerns about the ethics of imposing one's beliefs and practices on another group, particularly through methods that appear coercive or violent. It also prompts exploration of alternative perspectives, considering whether co-existence or cultural exchange might have been a more just and equitable approach, fostering mutual understanding instead of erasure.[251]

Beyond the explicit representations of colonialism in some Holy texts, its pervasive influence extends well into the fabric of human culture, manifesting in diverse and often subtle ways. Consider the enduring legacy of the "Age of Discovery." Spearheaded by Portugal after their 1415 conquest of Ceuta, this era witnessed a surge in expansionist ambitions driven by multiple factors: controlling the Strait of Gibraltar trade route, amassing wealth through plunder and trade, and proselytizing White Christianity – all within the context of a pre-existing, albeit minor, African slave trade that Portugal would soon dramatically expand. Fueled by new nautical technologies and a burgeoning *colonial imagination,* explorers ventured further: deeper into the

[250] Brueggemann, *Divine Presence Amid Violence*, 2009. The claim to the land in Deuteronomy 20 rings with entitlement and exclusivity. The land is 'given' to Israel; it is theirs by divine right. This kind of language easily translates into justifications for dominance and cultural assimilation of those already inhabiting the land.

[251] Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh*, 1979.

Americas, along the African coast, and into the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia. The 16th century marked a critical shift with the emergence of truly global empires, forged by advancements in navigation that shrunk the world and facilitated trade and conquest on an unprecedented scale.[252] Europe's "discovery" of the New World ushered in another chapter with the 1493 colonization of Ay-ti.[253] The Portuguese and Spanish empires, stretching across continents and dwarfing even powerful Eurasian rivals, became the first truly global colonial entities. Between 1580 and 1640, these empires functioned under a single crown throughout the Iberian Union. However, by the late 16th and 17th centuries, England, France, and the Dutch Republic, driven by their own *colonial imagination*,[254] carved out their own overseas empires, competing fiercely with established powers. These intricate webs of colonialism and imperialism, intrinsically linked to the dominance of White Bodies, continue to shape our world today, leaving deep scars on cultures, economies, theologies, and identities across the globe.[255]

In the early years of AmeriKan[256] colonialism, the lines between indentured servants and masters were not predicated by the copiousness or scarcity of melanin in one's skin – race. Black and White servants often lived and worked alongside one another. Equivalently, masters Black and White owned servants. However, this Master/Servant and Black/White dynamic shifted as

[252] Vine Deloria, *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*, 3rd ed. (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2003).

[253] The indigenous population of Haiti, known as the Taíno people, referred to the island of Hispaniola as "Ay-ti" in their language. The term "Ay-ti" can loosely be translated as "land of high mountains" or "mountainous land," referring to the rugged terrain of the island.

[254] Aníbal Quijano, *Aníbal Quijano: Foundational Essays on the Coloniality of Power*, ed. Walter Mignolo, Rita Laura Segato, and Catherine E. Walsh (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2024). The concept of the colonial imagination is central to Quijano's analysis, as he examines how colonial ideologies continue to inform and influence perceptions, identities, and power dynamics in postcolonial societies.

[255] David Abulafia, *The Mediterranean in History* (Los Angeles, CA: J Paul Getty Museum, 2011); John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Percival Spear, *The Oxford History of Modern India: 1740-1975* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997); Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2018).

[256] Of or relating to Amerika - and the fascist, oppressive, and racist aspect of American society.

the colonial (*racial*) imagination of White indentured servants caused them to break the covenant of servanthood.[257] Whites realized the privilege of racism within the capitalistic foothold of the Puritan faith belief. As the White indentured servants fled from servanthood, it became extremely laborious to locate and repossess indentured White servants due to the forthcoming privilege of Whiteness – that of white supremacy creating, White Bodies, not the other way around. Conversely, when Black indentured servants sought freedom from oppression, recapturing and reclaiming them was relatively effortless due to the foreshadowed encumbrance of Blackness. Subsequently, the early Puritan Church's capitalistic imagination caused them to claim that God had already willed and perpetuated the right for one Body to act in governance over other Bodies.[258] Thus, in the late seventeenth century, a governance of White Bodies over Black Bodies was evoked; propagating that only dark indentured servants would be used in chattel slavery - racialization of labor with White Bodies solidified as the standard of racial hierarchy. The profitability of enslaving Black Bodies became a cornerstone in the early AmeriKan economy, prompting White Bodies to heavily invest in the process of administering chattel slavery. The narrative propagated by White Bodies suggested that, despite the cruelty of chattel slavery, claiming that these enslaved Black Bodies were purportedly happier embracing free intellectual and physical labor than experiencing a pre-colonized life.[259] This narrative, along with a theological justification claiming divine sanction for the subjugation of Black Bodies justified the White pursuit of the Black Body, even to the extent of pressuring other

[257] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 1997; James, *The Black Jacobins*, 1963; West, *Race Matters*, 2001.

[258] Mark A. Noll, *God and Mammon: Protestants, Money, and the Market, 1790-1860* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[259] Decorie Smith, "The Relationship between Christianity and Slavery: An Examination of the Defense of Slavery within Christian Thought, Practices and Methodologies from 1619-1865," Liberty University Department of History, April 11, 2023, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5554&context=doctoral.

Black Bodies to either supply slaves or become enslaved themselves.[260] By doing this, the White Bodies and the White Church established a sophisticated system of political oppression within the colonized land, so that colonization and evangelization work hand in hand, and that the colonizer's fatherskygod[261] creates humans as inferior or superior. Thus, the primary violence of colonialism is theological, the semiotic violence of constructing the colonizer (believer) as a spiritual being and the colonized (unbeliever) as a material being. Once this system is set into motion, the rest is a foregone conclusion.[262]

Intersections of Blackness, Oppression, and the Ghetto

Having identified the meaning of colonization, and especially the colonial movement experienced in the formation of the "New World," making both the Black Body and the Black Church gorged and satiated in colonialism, the next question to be tackled is What does it mean to be Black? The dictionary problematically defines the word black as follows: "of or relating to Black people and often especially to African American people or their culture; dirty or soiled; thoroughly sinister or evil; without hope or alleviation; angry or resentful; and one deserving dishonor or censure."[263] To fully grasp the comprehensive meaning of the term Black, it is essential to approach Blackness as a concept intertwined with oppression and the ghetto.

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[260] James, *The Black Jacobins*, 1963.

[261] Christena Cleveland, *God Is a Black Woman* (New York, NY: Amistad, an imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers, 2023). The concept of "fatherskygod" references the distinctly patriarchal transcendent scary monster god, who can only show up as male, and who cannot be trusted as fatherskygod focuses solely on the spiritual realm, not the physical realm, and offering an escape from the natural into the static peace of timelessness and freedom, detached from humanity except to dominate them. Fatherskygod is not present or engaged when Oppressed Bodies need the Most Divine's presence the most.

[262] Michael Lackey, "Frantz Fanon on the Theology of Colonization," Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History, January 1, 2002, https://www.academia.edu/9738597/Frantz_Fanon_on_the_Theology_of_Colonization.

[263] Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, "Black Definition & Meaning," Merriam-Webster, 2020, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/black; Collins, "Collins Online Dictionary | Definitions, Thesaurus and Translations," Black, 2020, https://www.collinsdictionary.com/.

Historically and contemporaneously, the term "Black" refers to communities of Bodies who have experienced systemic oppression and marginalization stemming from an unjustly constructed racial categorization. Thus, *Blackness* is a condition of human existence that can never be erased, for it announces a specific difference in Black Bodies that is necessary for human freedom.[264] This experience has shaped a distinct cultural identity characterized by faith, strength, resilience, and the ongoing journey towards justice. But the story of Black faith does not begin and end with its forced adoption by enslaved Black people (See Figure 2). Beneath the surface of imposed Christianity, a potent wellspring of ancestral spiritual traditions pulsed, waiting to be unleashed. This rich tapestry of beliefs and practices would provide the foundation for a unique and powerful expression of faith within the confines of the Black Church.

[264] Jones, *God in the Ghetto*, 1979; Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004); Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994).

Figure 2 Intersections of Blackness, Oppression, and the Ghetto

Blackness	Oppression	The Ghetto
Blackness is an identity that is constantly being constituted in relation to representation, and it is a field of political struggle. Blackness is not a fixed or static identity, but a contested and dynamic terrain of struggle.[265]	To speak of colonialism is to speak of a situation where the human being is diminished, the native is declared inferior and irrelevant.[266]	The ghetto, far from being an accidental occurrence, is the natural and inevitable consequence of a racist society.[267]
Blackness is a theological category because it is a way of naming the experience of being a Black Body. This experience is marked by a history of slavery, segregation, and racism. It is also an experience of resilience, creativity, and faith. Blackness signifies the ontological struggle and liberative hope of a people who have been repeatedly terrorized, stigmatized, and dehumanized in a culture which stereotypes them as unintelligent, inferior, and primitive.[268]	Oppression is both a set of external conditions (such as poverty and lack of access to resources) and an embodied experience that occurs when we are cut off from our own deepest truths and forced to live in ways that don't fit who we truly are. Oppression is not just a set of interpersonal relationships; it is a material force that has been written into the bodies of all people.[269]	The ghetto is a symbol of all those places in which the poor are forced to live, places that are deprived of resources, of hope, of light. The ghetto is a place of desperation, of darkness, of despair.[270]
Blackness is that socio-political identity that is informed and shaped by the experience of oppression.[271]	Oppression is the systematic dehumanization and social death of certain groups of people, marked by exploitation, violence, and the denial of basic human rights.[272]	The ghetto is a prison created by U.S. imperialism and racism that terrorizes and traumatizes its inhabitants, while it also fortifies the privileges of the rulers.[273]

[265] bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End, 1993).
[266] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 2021
[267] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 1989.
[268] Katie G. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006).
[269] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 2017.
[270] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 1973.
[271] Douglas, *Stand Your Ground*, 2015; Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 1999.
[272] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 2010.
[273] Cornel West, *Democracy Matters* (New York, NY: Penguin Group USA, 2005).

Fertile Ground

The Black Church arose from the fertile ground of resistance amidst the brutal institution of slavery in the 17th and 18th centuries. Drawing upon the insights of theologians such as Albert J. Raboteau, Delores S. Williams, and William Augustus Jones, it becomes evident that despite the coercive imposition of their masters' religion, enslaved individuals exhibited remarkable agency in creatively blending their ancestral spiritual traditions with Christianity. This fusion not only gave rise to a distinct and potent expression of faith within the Black Church but also served as a testament to the resilience and ingenuity of enslaved communities in navigating and transcending the constraints of their oppressive circumstances. Building upon these scholarly insights, it is my firm belief that despite the coercive imposition of their masters' religion, enslaved Black Bodies demonstrated remarkable resilience and agency by creatively integrating their ancestral spiritual traditions with Christianity. This synthesis not only resulted in the emergence of a distinct and potent expression of faith within the Black Church but also stands as a testament to the enduring strength and ingenuity of Black Bodies in the face of adversity. This early Black Theology, though often marginalized in Eurocentric narratives, offered solace, hope, and a foundation for collective action. Black Churches were not mere sanctuaries; they were engines of liberation. During the abolitionist movement, Black Pastors like Henry McNeal Turner and Harriet Tubman's AME Zion Church in Philadelphia became vital hubs for organizing and resistance. Turner notes: "The Negro Church is at the head of every movement for the elevation of our race. No other organized body of our people has done as much towards our political, educational, and religious advancement."[274] Black Churches provided safe

[274] Gary Dorrien, *The New Abolition: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Black Social Gospel* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016).

havens along the Underground Railroad, and Black voices like Frederick Douglass' powerful anti-slavery incitements resonated from countless pulpits.[275] Following the Civil War, Black Churches as anchors of the Black community, transformed into a Church Body that offered education, healthcare, and social services, filling the gaps left by a segregated society.[276] Leaders like Mother Mary Jones and Richard Allen shaped not just communities, but the course of history through their tireless advocacy for civil rights.

> In addition to the traditional concerns of worship, moral nurture, education, and social control, the Black Church has no challenger as the cultural womb of the black community. Not only did it give birth to new institutions such as schools, banks, insurance companies, and low-income housing, but it also provided an academy and an arena for political activities, and it nurtured young talent for musical, dramatic, and artistic development.[277]

The Great Migration saw millions of Black families seeking new opportunities in urban centers. The Black Church again rose to meet the challenge, providing support networks, cultural connections, and spiritual guidance in unfamiliar landscapes.[278] And when the Civil Rights Movement erupted, Black Churches were its bedrock. From Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s inspiring calls for justice, and Malcolm X's impassioned advocacy for self-determination and empowerment, to countless unsung heroes organizing and mobilizing from their pews, the Black Church was the social justice movement's beating heart.[279] In recent decades, the Black Church has faced challenges like declining membership and changing demographics.

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[275] James Hal Cone, *For My People Black Theology and the Black Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984).

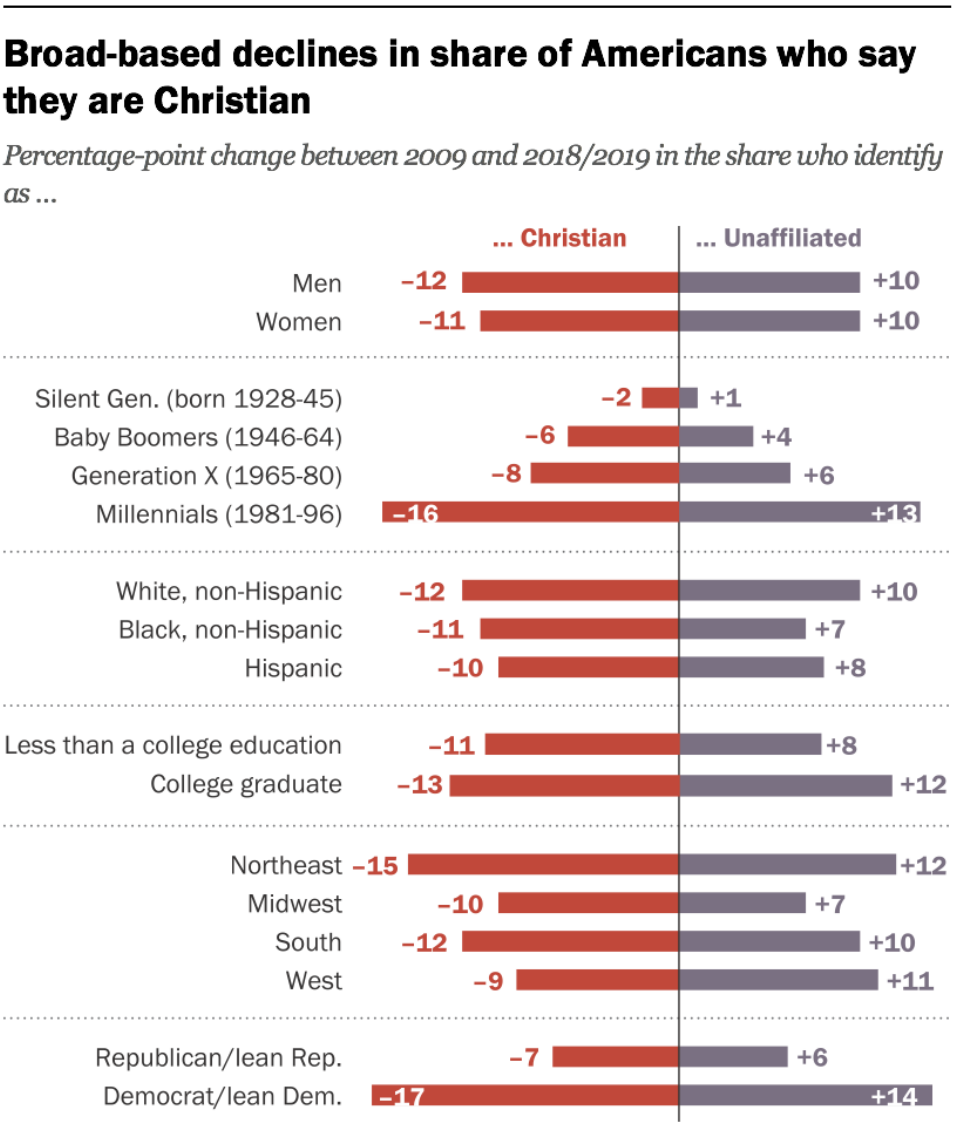
[276] Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 2005.

[277] Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 2005.

[278] Pinn and Pinn, *Introduction to Black Church History*, 2002.

[279] Supad Kumar Ghose, *UITS Journal* 5, no. 1 (June 5, 2019): 58–68, https://uits.edu.bd/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/05-The-Role-of-the-Black-Church-in-the-58-68.pdf.

Figure 3 **Christians in America Today**


Broad-based declines in share of Americans who say they are Christian
Percentage-point change between 2009 and 2018/2019 in the share who identify as ...
... Christian
... Unaffiliated
Men −12 +10
Women −11 +10
Silent Gen. (born 1928-45) −2 +1
Baby Boomers (1946-64) −6 +4
Generation X (1965-80) −8 +6
Millennials (1981-96) −16 +13
White, non-Hispanic −12 +10
Black, non-Hispanic −11 +7
Hispanic −10 +8
Less than a college education −11 +8
College graduate −13 +12
Northeast −15 +12
Midwest −10 +7
South −12 +10
West −9 +11
Republican/lean Rep. −7 +6
Democrat/lean Dem. −17 +14
Source: Aggregated Pew Research Center political surveys conducted 2009 and January 2018-July 2019 on the telephone.
"In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace"
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

[280]

However, it remains an evolving entity, constantly adapting to meet the needs of its

[280] Michael Lipka and Aleksandra Sandstrom, eds., "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, October 17, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapi d-pace/.

communities. New theological streams like Liberation Theology, Process Theology, Queer Theology, and Eco Theology continue to challenge injustice, as the Black Church's commitment to social justice keeps it relevant and influential.

The Black Church's narrative is deeply woven with "Prophetic Imagination," is a testament to its extraordinary resilience, resistance, and reinvention.[281] From its roots intertwined with the fight towards freedom to its skyward branches stretching toward the promise of hope: decolonization and reconciliation, it stands as a powerful testament to faith, *agapē*, and community. Yet, beneath this narrative lie the insidious legacies of colonialism. Examining these legacies is not merely an academic exercise; it is a necessary step towards authentically embodying the Church's core values as set by Yeshua when asked "Which is most important of all the commandments (Mark 12:28b MSG)?" Yeshua answered, "Love the Lord God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence and energy. And love others as well as you love yourself (Mark 12: 30-31 MSG)."

Unraveling Colonial Threads

- Hate: Colonial ideologies fueled the dehumanization of Black bodies, breeding racism and prejudice that continue to permeate society and infiltrate even sacred spaces. As Cone argues in *Black Theology and Black Power*, "The Black experience is rooted in the American White's definition of Blackness as evil."[282]
- Fear: The threat of violence and oppression used to control Black Bodies and Oppressed

[281] Michael Brandon McCormack, dissertation, *The Preachers and the Powers that Be(t): Black Youth, Moral Panic and Public Theological Discourse in the Era of Hip-Hop* (2013), https://ir.vanderbilt.edu/bitstream/handle/1803/15233/DissertationGDRElectronicSubmission7.pdf?sequence=1.

[282] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 1969.

Communities also instilled a pervasive fear, hindering critical thought and action, for "the legacy of slavery casts a long shadow of fear over Black life; fear that cripples and silences."[283]

- Deception: White Bodies, using White Male God, appropriated, distorted, and weaponized religious concepts to legitimize their domination, and thus Christianity became the ideological arm of European imperialism globally.[284]
- Cultural Alienation: Systematic efforts to erase Black Bodies and suppress Black cultural identities and systems left many disconnected from their ancestral roots. Womanist and Theo-poet Maya Angelou poignantly penned it this way:

> The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned. It impels mighty ambitions and dangerous capers. We shout in Baptist Churches, wear yarmulkes and wigs and argue even the tiniest in the Torah or worship the sun and refuse to kill cows for the starving. Hoping that by doing these things, home will find us acceptable or that barring that, we will forget our awful yearning for it.[285]

- Not Following in the Footsteps of Yeshua or Yehoshua: The stark contrast between the teachings of Yeshua, emphasizing radical love and justice, and the colonial practices of domination and exploitation illuminates the need for the Black Church to escalate its prophetic voice and challenge these distortions in order to "recover the radicalism of a love that centers the needs of the most marginalized."[286]

[283] Douglas, *Stand Your Ground*, 2015.
[284] Albert B. Cleage, *The Black Messiah* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2017).
[285] Maya Angelou, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (New York, NY: Random House, 1997), 196.
[286] Emilie Maureen Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 89.

Resistance and Decolonization

Decolonizing the Black Church is not about erasing history but about a reclamation which confronts and dismantles the lingering structures and ideologies that hinder its full potential. It is about reclaiming its Prophetic Imagination, re-rooting itself in ancestral wisdom, and building a community centered on justice, liberation, and agapē love. By acknowledging and addressing the legacies of colonialism, the Black Church can truly become a beacon of hope and healing for all. Thus, the question remains: What is decolonization, and how does it apply to the black church? Put succinctly, decolonization is a multifaceted process of liberation, encompassing political, economic, social, cultural, religious, and psychological emancipation from all forms of colonial oppression. Decolonization is the liberating of oneself from the dismantling of oppressive structures rooted in colonialism. As our contemporary culture remains deeply interwoven with colonial legacies, navigating the path toward decolonization requires a multi-pronged approach. This trajectory can unfold progressively or abruptly, and its manifestations range from peaceful acts like the nonviolent protests and civil disobedience of the Civil Rights Movement to the violent and revolutionary struggle exemplified by the Haitian Revolution. Here, Black Bodies, recognizing their innate humanity, fiercely resisted their colonizers to attain independence, affirming the humanity of every individual on the island of Ay-ti. Moreover, the movement toward decolonization can originate from different directions, whether initiated by the colonizer or propelled by the colonized, unfolding from the top down or the bottom up.

- Decolonization requires a willingness to confront the past, to address the legacies of colonialism, and to build a more just and equitable world.
- Decolonization is not simply a matter of gaining political independence; it is also

about dismantling the systems of power that have been used to oppress people of color.

- One of the key aspects of decolonization is the recovery of indigenous knowledge and traditions.
- Decolonization also requires the dismantling of the Eurocentric worldview that has been used to justify colonialism.
- It is a process of healing and transformation, and it is essential for the creation of a more just and equitable world.

The decolonizing work is "human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. Even a casual look at history shows that no social advance rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, struggle, tireless exertions, and the passionate concern of dedicated individuals. Without this persistent effort, time itself becomes the ally of the insurgent and primitive forces of social stagnation and colonial thought."[287]

Decolonization, therefore, is the deliberate, calculated, and proactive resistance against the influences of oppressive structures and legacies of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and exploitation of minds, bodies, lands, and faith systems. It is undertaken with the ultimate goal of overturning the colonial structure and achieving the liberation of the Black Body. It is crucial to emphasize that decolonization necessitates a complete overhaul of the existing colonial system. It is not about making superficial adjustments to render the system more friendly or slightly less oppressive. The current system is inherently and irreparably flawed. At its core, decolonization is an active rejection of colonial forces. It's a conscious and

[287] Martin Luther King Jr., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Clayborne Carson et al. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 267.

calculated resistance against the subjugation and exploitation experienced by Black Bodies. This resistance targets not only physical domination but also the systemic inequalities, psychological and theological impacts rooted in the colonial order. However, decolonization is not merely about reforming or tweaking the existing colonial system. It demands a more radical transformation, aiming for the complete dismantling of the oppressive structures and power imbalances entrenched within it. A complex interplay of forces engaged in a constant struggle. On one hand, it represents the call to question and resist the entrenched inequalities and injustices of the colonial order. On the other hand, it embodies the ongoing efforts to dismantle these structures and create a more just and equitable world. This necessitates a critical examination of all aspects of life, from political systems and economic structures to cultural narratives and educational practices.

In the context of changing the theological order in the implementation of the Word, decolonization is a historical process that cannot unfold discreetly. Its comprehension and clarity emerge only to the extent that we discern the historical movements shaping its form and content. Decolonization involves the convergence of two opposing forces, as articulated in the parable of the Vineyard: “The last will be first, and the first will be last, for many are called, but few are chosen (Matthew 20:16 NRSV with a footnote from other ancient authorities added).” It signifies a profound questioning of the colonial predicament and active resistance against the oppressive colonial structure. So, when thinking about the movement of decolonization on a personal level, we can continue this work towards decolonizing our own Body, the Black Body, and the Black Church not by asking what the world needs, but by asking what makes you come alive, and doing it. What the world needs is people – Bodies – who have come alive and found a way to live the life that God created us to live.

Decolonizing Theology: Reclaiming Our Voices and Narratives

One crucial step in decolonizing the Black Church involves engaging in a critical reevaluation of its theological frameworks. For too long, empirical interpretations of the Bible and fatherskygod's theological traditions have dominated discourses within the Black Church, often overlooking or diminishing the unique experiences and perspectives of Black Bodies. It is critical to challenge these Eurocentric lenses and reclaim our own rich theological heritage. As James Hal Cone, a pivotal figure in Black Liberation Theology, powerfully articulates, "Black theology seeks to demonstrate the validity of Black life in the face of white oppression. It is a theology which seeks to free Christianity from the dominating power of white supremacists."[288] By centering the lived realities and voices of Black people, we can cultivate a theology that resonates directly with our contexts and struggles, offering both solace and liberation. This journey also necessitates breaking free from the shackles of the Western Christian Imagination, which frequently presumes White Male God as the sole origin and authority on faith.

As Willie James Jennings, author of "The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race," notes, this perspective needs to be dismantled and replaced with one that acknowledges the multifaceted and global contributions to Christianity, including those of Black Bodies.[289] Decolonizing the Black Church demands a thorough examination of its structures and practices, identifying all of the ways in which White Body Privilege has seeped into our ecclesial systems and practices. This will help us in the continued dismantling of any remnants of colonial influence that perpetuate inequities and hinder the flourishing of the Black Church and the Black Body. Ultimately, decolonizing Black Church theology aims to reclaim a sacred space that is

[288] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 2010.

[289] Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

communal, interdependent, and life-giving. Decolonizing the Black Church is about crafting a theological framework that celebrates the unique gifts and contributions of Black Bodies, nurturing community, and offering spiritual resources for resilience and liberation. In our continued journey in decolonizing the Black Church, we must be open to the multifaceted approach of:

- Reclaiming a Prophetic Voice: Embracing Liberation Theology empowers us to rediscover the Black Church's prophetic legacy. As James Perkinson reminds us, it calls for reading scripture "from the bottom up," amplifying the voices of the marginalized and centering our theology on their struggle for justice and liberation.[290]
- Dismantling the Internalized Matrix of Domination: The Black Church cannot fully resist external colonial forces while harboring patriarchal structures within. Dismantling these internal systems, as Kelly Brown Douglas urges, requires rejecting the dominant culture's gender norms and prioritizing the experiences and voices of women and LGBTQ+ individuals, reimagining our community toward greater inclusivity and equity.[291]
- Confronting the Hydra of Racism: To decolonize truly, we must actively dismantle the systemic racism that permeates our society, including within the Black Church itself. As Willie James Jennings (2015) implores, the gospel compels us to dismantle "systems of racialized violence and injustice" and heal the wounds inflicted by them. Centering anti-racist work is essential for building a community committed to justice and liberation for all.[292]
- Reclaiming Communal Solidarity: In an era of rampant individualism and consumerism,

[290] James W. Perkinson, *Political Spirituality in an Age of Eco-Apocalypse* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 9.
[291] Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 1999.
[292] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 2010.

the Black Church must reclaim its core communal values. As Emilie M. Townes emphasizes, a thriving Christian tradition fosters solidarity, encouraging individuals and communities to act for the common good. By prioritizing the needs and perspectives of our community, we can forge a Black Church dedicated to collective liberation and social transformation.[293]

What does the deconstruction of a black church look like?

The deconstruction of a Black Church involves a nuanced examination of its historical context, practices, and structures, addressing the question of what this process looks like. While "deconstruction" may seem synonymous with dismantling, in the context of the Black Church, it implies a critical reexamination of its structures and doctrines, aiming to reclaim the critical reevaluation of inherited beliefs, power dynamics, and cultural influences to foster a more inclusive, liberated, and authentically representative faith community. This deconstruction involves dismantling colonial legacies embedded within the Black Church and further embracing a theology that is responsive to contemporary needs while staying rooted in the prophetic traditions that define its essence.

The Black Church & Resistance

In resisting colonialism and recognizing both the triumphs and shortcomings in the Black Church's long journey, the Black Church has demonstrated remarkable resilience and resistance.

[293] Emilie Maureen Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

Through the lens of Black Liberation Theology and Process Theology, deconstructing the Black Church is not just about resistance (though resistance remains crucial). It delves into a critical reexamination of its internal structures, questioning how they may perpetuate colonial ideologies and reinforce power imbalances. Here are some examples:

- Spirituals as Sermons in Song: An iconic form of resistance during the Jim Crow era was expressed through spirituals. Rooted in religious traditions, these songs served as a poignant outlet to articulate the pain and suffering of enslavement and oppression. Coded messages within spirituals, such as "Wade in the Water," provided a means for enslaved to communicate with each other, exemplifying the subversive power of cultural expression. Theologian James Cone asserts that in fact, spirituals were more than mere hymns; they were "cries of the oppressed" and veiled messages of liberation. These songs, like "Wade in the Water," served as coded maps for escaping oppression and bondage, a testament to the subversive power of faith against oppression.[294]
- Unpacking the "Education Legacy:" The Black Church actively resisted colonial oppression – often aimed to assimilate Black communities into Eurocentric norms – through education, addressing the denial of access to public schools for Black Bodies during Jim Crow. Many churches, like Bethel Baptist Institutional Church in Jacksonville, Florida, established schools, exemplified by the case of its school transforming into Edward Waters College. This educational activism was pivotal in challenging systemic barriers.
- Reimagining Community Building: While historical community building fostered solidarity, deconstruction examines if current practices unintentionally exclude

[294] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 1989.

marginalized voices within the Church, perpetuate gender roles, or fail to address internal prejudices based on class, sexuality, or disability, the one of the ways the Black Church has been journeying towards is in inclusivity. Resisting colonialism, the Black Church has served as a nexus for community building. Amid pervasive segregation and discrimination, Black Churches provided a space for Black Bodies to unite, share experiences, and organize for justice. Notably, Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, played a central role in the Civil Rights Movement, serving as a crucial meeting place for activists like Martin Luther King Jr.

- Reclaiming Activism: The Black Church also played a key role in activism during the Jim Crow era. Many churches organized protests, boycotts, and other forms of resistance against segregation and discrimination. For example, the Friendship Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, played a crucial role in the Atlanta Student Movement, a series of protests and sit-ins against segregation in the early 1960s.

These multifaceted methods of resistance, deeply rooted in the Black Church's history, laid the groundwork for a profound sense of resilience in the face of oppression. They became catalysts for transformative movements, including the Civil Rights Movement, showcasing the enduring impact of the Black Church's commitment to justice, equality, and the dismantling of colonial structures.

The Role of the Black Church in the Decolonization Movement

Starting with a set of events that can be the ground for a liberatory decolonized Black Church, one should easily discern that the Black Church is not just starting its journey in its own decolonization, but these Black Bodies have been *in* the decolonization movement since its birth.

With its Prophetic Imagination, the Black Church has shifted how colonization has portrayed the notion of the image of God and must continue the journey towards decolonization from the front as this liberatory journey is grounded in the experiences of the oppressed and its pursuit "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8 NIV)."

Across Lines and Borders: Unchained Narratives of Resistance

During the Haitian Revolution, the Black Church played a pivotal role in Ay-ti's pursuit of independence. Leaders such as Toussaint L'Ouverture drew inspiration from their faith, utilizing it to mobilize communities for the revolutionary cause. Notably, figures like Boukman, a Muslim Cleric, and Houngan, employed religious symbols and rituals to inspire their Black Bodies and garner widespread public support. Religious "norms" and patriarchal gender "norms" were nullified as both women and faith practices ostracized by the White Church like Vodou were central in inspiring and unifying revolutionaries. This historic uprising marked the world's first successful slave revolt, leading to the establishment of the inaugural black republic. The Haitian Revolution empowered Black Bodies to harness the Prophetic Imagination, not only liberating themselves from the shackles of enslavement but also engaging them in a creative act of self-actualization allowing freedom to flourish in the imagine of the Black Body.

- Underground Railroad: During the Antebellum period, the Black Church served as a crucial node in the clandestine network of the Underground Railroad - a clandestine network of secret routes and safe houses - facilitating the escape, offering sanctuary, and guidance to freedom-seeking slaves. Providing spiritual guidance and unwavering support, the Black Church, including courageous Black leaders, like Harriet Tubman and

Henry Highland Garnet risked their lives to facilitate escapes and advocate for the abolition of slavery.

- Civil Rights Movement: This commitment to liberation and legacy of activism continued during the Civil Rights Movement, as the Black Churches housed meetings, served as central meeting points, and organizing center, facilitated nonviolent protests, and nurtured leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., whose faith grounded his unwavering commitment to justice and equality. The Black Church emerged as a formidable force during the Civil Rights Movement, contributing significantly to the struggle towards social justice.
- Liberation Theology: In the late 20th century, Black theologians spearheaded the development of Liberation Theology within the Black Church, a framework that reinterprets Christian teachings through the lens of the oppressed, emphasizing the pivotal role of social justice and liberation. Theologians such as James Cone and Gustavo Gutiérrez have centered the experiences of the marginalized and are challenging White Body Privilege within the Black Church and within the world at large, thereby providing a potent theological underpinning for social justice.

The legacy of decolonizing theologies continues in the present day to reverberate in the vibrant activism of Black Churches. Their commitment to collective liberation extends beyond historical struggles, actively shaping contemporary movements for social justice. Black Churches stand prominently alongside Black Bodies calling for an end to police brutality and dismantling systemic racism, exemplified by their vocal presence within the Black Lives Matter movement. Recognizing the shared burdens of colonialism and White Body Privilege, Black Churches and Black Bodies also lend their voices to advocacy for immigration reform, challenging unjust

immigration policies that disproportionately impact Black Bodies and Black communities. Furthermore, they play a crucial role in environmental justice initiatives, amplifying the voices of communities disproportionately affected by environmental racism and advocating for equitable environmental policies. Furthermore, some Black Churches are deeply engaged in the reparations movement, actively seeking to address the historical and ongoing impacts of slavery through financial compensation and policy reforms that empower Black Bodies and their communities. Through these diverse engagements, Black churches demonstrate the dynamism and relevance in these contemporary issues of decolonization theology in tackling the pressing issues of our time.

This enduring commitment to liberation compels a critical examination of Christian Theology's complex relationship with colonialism. Confronting the question of whether to relinquish faith and spiritual traditions to colonial powers for material gain or to reshape "The Church" as a tool against oppressive forces, is a daunting task. The immensity of Western colonial ventures and the complicity of many faith-based institutions raise a haunting question: can this faith, wielded by empires as a tool of subjugation, ever be reclaimed for true emancipation? Must we abandon our spiritual traditions in the face of seemingly insurmountable economic and political forces?

Such despair ignores the historical fluidity of power and the transformative potential of faith. Drawing on the wisdom of the Hebrew prophet Isaiah, who envisioned transforming instruments of violence into tools of cultivation,[295] we possess a narrative that explores the co-optation of Christian religiosity by colonial powers. These imagined swords reforged into a tool used to loosen the soil of the Theological Imagination is a way of decolonizing the master's

[295] They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks (Isaiah 2:4 KJV).

tools. It reminds Black Bodies that Christian theology was not always an instrument of oppression, but arose from a peasant movement, originating in Roman-occupied Palestine, in direct opposition to the Kingdom of Caesar – the Roman hegemony. The early movement of "the Way" offers a poignant reminder that these tools, though appropriated by Empire and White Bodies, can be repurposed for justice and agapē love. Therefore, the Black Church and Black Bodies stand at a crucial juncture. They wield a legacy forged in resistance, enriched by contemporary struggles, and imbued with the transformative potential of faith. This dissertation asserts that while the masters may currently wield the tools, they were originally stolen, urging a reevaluation of the historical context of early Christianity and a reminder that these tools have not always been in the hands of the masters.

What does the Black church look like in the 21st century?

The Black Church stands at a crossroads. For centuries, its traditions have been shaped by European theology and doctrines, intertwined with the legacies of enslavement and colonization and the call for reconciliation within the Black Church necessitates a critical examination of its internal and external landscapes.

Reclaiming the Roots of Faith and Liberation

To achieve true liberation, the Black Church must further embark on a journey of decolonizing its practices, beliefs, and traditions, shedding inherited Eurocentric frameworks and reclaiming the vibrant tapestry of its indigenous roots, and embracing a more inclusive and

equitable faith system.[296] However, navigating this path necessitates acknowledging and confronting the formidable obstacles as the decolonization in the Black Church has multifaceted roots, often manifesting as resistance to change, fueled by centuries of the ingrained White Theology perpetuated by fatherskygod, and the fear of the unfamiliar.[297] Lack of resources, both financial and institutional, further impedes progress, hindering efforts to establish an infrastructure for reclaiming pre-colonial indigenous practices.[298] While the call for change is juxtaposed with the resistance and desire to preserve the status quo, hope lies in Black Bodies and the Black Church relying ever more on their Prophetic Imagination to deconstruct the long shadow of internalized oppression, self-deprecation, and undermining the pursuit of a truly inclusive and equitable faith bolstering solidarity with other marginalized communities. Further, by embracing a radically inclusive understanding of faith, informed by the "good news" of clothing our divine Self with the "perfect Human (The Gospel of Mary 10:11)," and walking humbly with God in pursuit of justice (Micah 6:8 MSG), the Black Church can embody the *agapē* love ethic revealed in the life of Yeshua (Matthew 22:36-40 NRSV).[299] This decolonization is not merely a historical correction; it is a prophetic act, paving the way for a future where the Black Church stands as a beacon of liberation for all. Decolonizing the Church is a journey that the Black Church has been on since its inception and is a journey that Black Bodies within the Black Church must continue.

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[296] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 2017.

[297] Nadia Reid, "Resistance to Change: Obstacles to Decolonization in the Black Church," *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 18, no. 2 (2017): 123.

[298]. James Horne, "Financial Challenges in Decolonizing the Black Church," *Journal of Ecclesiastical Economics* 45, no. 3 (2016): 189.

[299] Aisha Rahim, "Internalized Oppression and its Impact on the Black Church," *Journal of Liberation Theology* 29, no. 4 (2019): 56; Lauren Fields, "Inclusivity Struggles in the Black Church: A Case Study," *Feminist Theology* 22, no. 1 (2018): 87; Yolanda Pierce, "Centering the Margins: A Call for Theological Reflections and Ministry Practices in the Black Church," *Journal of African American Theology* 41, no. 2 (2020): 145; 1. Gregory Stevens, "Liberation Theologies: Decolonizing the Masters' Tool," Hampton Institute, January 1, 2020, https://www.hamptonthink.org/read/liberation-theologies-decolonizing-the-masters-tool.

Applying Decolonization: Challenges and Opportunities

The journey towards decolonizing the Black Church and Black bodies is both arduous and necessary. While a rich history and resilient community provide the foundation, the legacy of oppression and the complexities of the present pose significant challenges. By understanding these challenges and opportunities, the Black Church and Black bodies can navigate the complex path towards decolonization. Embracing their rich heritage, mobilizing their collective power, and remaining steadfast in their commitment to healing and justice are crucial steps in reclaiming their rightful place in a world free from oppression (See Figure 4).

Reconciliation in the Black Church: Healing and Restoration

Reconciliation, within the context of the Black Church, transcends its dictionary definition of mere conflict resolution. Rather, reconciliation is rooted in the act of restoring relationships and resolving conflicts. It is a multifaceted process demanding acknowledgment of harm, commitment to healing, and efforts towards restoration - encompassing the mending of internal and external wounds inflicted by centuries of systemic oppression and marginalization. It operates on various scales, from personal relationships to larger societal contexts, fostering justice, compassion, and healing and demands acknowledging and addressing the harms perpetrated against the Black Body and the Black Church, both historically and within contemporary realities.

Figure 4 Challenges & Opportunities of Applying Decolonization

Challenges	Opportunities
The legacy of colonization and white supremacy is deeply embedded in the Black Church and Black Bodies, making it difficult to fully decolonize. As Menakem notes, "the legacy of colonization, slavery, and oppression is lodged deep within the collective psyche of Black people in America, and it manifests in various forms of trauma, including emotional, physical, and spiritual trauma."[300]	The Black Church and Black Bodies have a rich history and tradition that can be harnessed to support decolonization efforts. As Jones attests, "the Black Church has a unique history of resistance to oppression and a tradition of liberation theology that can be used to support efforts to decolonize Black Bodies."[301]
The Black Church and Black Bodies have a rich history and tradition that can be harnessed to support decolonization efforts. As Jones attests, "the Black Church has a unique history of resistance to oppression and a tradition of liberation theology that can be used to support efforts to decolonize Black Bodies."[302]	The Black Church and Black Bodies have a rich network of community organizations and activists that can support decolonization efforts including faith-based groups and social justice initiatives, are working to decolonize Black Bodies, promote liberation and self-determination for Black communities, ultimately striving for a more just and equitable society.
The Black Church and Black Bodies often face resistance from those who benefit from the current system of oppression. As Menakem notes, "there are often powerful forces that resist efforts to decolonize, including those who benefit from the current system of oppression."[303]	The Black Church and Black Bodies can leverage the power of grassroots organizing and community mobilization to create change. As Jones demonstrates, "there is a long history of Black communities organizing and mobilizing to create change, and this power can be harnessed to support decolonization efforts."[304]
Historically and within contemporary society, The Black Church and Black Bodies face systemic marginalization and exclusion from dominant institutions and processes of governance. This ongoing disenfranchisement from the political and economic systems shaping their lives poses a significant barrier to Black Bodies achieving transformative change	The process of decolonization holds the potential to be a profoundly transformative and liberative experience for the Black Church and Black Bodies, empowering them to reclaim their autonomy and reassert their roles as sources of power and liberation for Black communities. This reclaiming of agency and authority can contribute significantly to the broader pursuit of social justice, not only within the Black Body but also within White Body.
The process of decolonization is ongoing and requires sustained effort and commitment. As Menakem notes, "decolonization is not a one-time event, but rather an ongoing process that requires a sustained commitment to healing and transformation."[305]	The Black Church and Black Bodies can demand systemic change. As Menakem argues, "the power of Black communities lies in their collective ability to demand change, and this power can be harnessed to support decolonization efforts."[306]

[300] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 2017.
[301] Jones, *God in the Ghetto*, 1979.
[302] Jones, *God in the Ghetto*, 1979.
[303] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 2017.
[304] Jones, *God in the Ghetto*, 1979.
[305] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 2017.
[306] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 2017.

This intricate process necessitates the willingness of both parties to engage, involving the acknowledgment of past wrongs, expressions of remorse, and the creation of space for open dialogue. This transformative journey aims at building resilient communities founded on justice, peace, and equity, embodying the teachings embodied by Yeshua and the principles of agapē love which transcends social identities. It is a commitment to recognize the humanity of all Bodies, fostering a society where everybody is valued, respected, and treated with dignity. This transformative journey demands individual and collective action, requiring a commitment to deconstructing systems of oppression, and working towards creating a more inclusive and just society.

This is why the concept of "parakaleō,"[307] as used in the Holy Bible becomes pivotal in this context, as it signifies a call for assistance, exhortation, and "to call alongside," offers a powerful model for reconciliation within the Black Church. This necessitates a critical reevaluation of theological frameworks, the dismantling of internalized matrices of domination, and the embrace of communal solidarity. It calls for a collaborative journey toward mutual healing and restoration, encouraging individuals and communities to walk alongside one another in support and unity. However, the path towards reconciliation for the Black Church faces several formidable challenges, including the need to confront historical and ongoing effects of oppression, discrimination, and racial and gender injustice. Reconciliation and reconstruction of the Black Body and the Black Church thus demand a renewed emphasis on reclaiming communal solidarity, fostering transparent communication, and engaging in transformative actions for justice and love.

[307] Blue Letter Bible, "G3870 - Parakaleō - Strong's Greek Lexicon (KJV)," Blue Letter Bible, 2024, https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3870/kjv/tr/0-1/.

The Paraklētic Imperative

The act of reconciling the Black Body and the Black Church is a long and tenuous journey that is not merely meant to patch wounds but is one that will allow humanity – the Black Body and the Black Church – to undergo a metamorphosis, allowing this Body to emerge with a new Spirit birthed from a wholehearted agapē love for God, Self, and others. In essence, it is a paraklētic imperative,[308] a divinely inspired call to comfort, uplift, and restore. This paraklētic journey demands unflinching self-examination, for both the Black Body and the Black Church. Thus, both the Black Body and the Black community, exemplified by the Black Church in this context, must confront their complicity in perpetuating harm. They must acknowledge the pain experienced by marginalized voices, including self-inflicted pain, and repent for historical blind spots. Both the individual and communal entities must dismantle discriminatory structures, foster inclusive spaces, and provide tangible reparations for past injustices.

Yet, reconciliation transcends mere apologies. It necessitates fostering a new culture, one of empathy, one that actively listens to the narratives of pain and resilience that weave through the Black experience. By embracing intersectionality and celebrating the richness of the Black Body and its spiritual traditions, the Black Church can rediscover its prophetic imagination, reclaiming communal solidarity fractured by centuries of conflict and oppression. Ultimately, reconciling the Black Church and the Black Body is an act of love, a transformative process weaving together shattered narratives into a tapestry of hope. It is a paraklētic imperative, a divinely-inspired call to heal the wounds of the past, dismantle the present's oppressive structures, and create "*a Way*" – and by extension, a world – where all Bodies and faith beliefs

[308] Blue Letter Bible, "G3875 - Paraklētos - Strong's Greek Lexicon (KJV)," Blue Letter Bible, 2024, https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3875/kjv/tr/0-1/.

are embraced, valued, and empowered. This is the true legacy of the Black Church, its sacred Paraklētic mission, and its ongoing journey towards liberation. This is how the Black Church, and the Black Body can further journey into their full nature as a divine Body fashioned with the DNA of the *imago Dei* and *imitatio Dei*.

In conclusion, the journey toward reconciliation for the Black Church and Black Bodies is multifaceted and requires a deep commitment to transformation. The concept of "Parakaleō," as found in the Holy Scriptures, offers a powerful model for this reconciliation, calling for assistance, exhortation, and walking alongside one another in support and unity. This journey demands a critical reevaluation of theological frameworks, the dismantling of internalized matrices of domination, and the embrace of communal solidarity. However, it also faces formidable challenges, including confronting the historical and ongoing effects of oppression and discrimination. Reconciliation is not merely about patching wounds but about allowing for a transformative metamorphosis, birthing a new Spirit rooted in agapē love for God, Self, and others.

Moreover, reconciliation requires unflinching self-examination, acknowledgment of complicity in perpetuating harm, and repentance for historical deficiencies. It entails dismantling discriminatory structures, fostering inclusive spaces, and providing tangible reparations for past injustices. Moreover, it transcends apologies, necessitating the fostering of a new culture of empathy and active listening to the narratives of pain and resilience within the Black experience. By embracing intersectionality and celebrating the richness of the Black Body and its spiritual traditions, the Black Church can rediscover its prophetic imagination and reclaim fractured communal solidarity.

Ultimately, reconciling the Black Church and the Black Body is an act of transformative

love, weaving together shattered narratives into a tapestry of hope. It is a divinely inspired imperative to heal past wounds, dismantle present oppressive structures, and create a world where all Bodies and faith beliefs are embraced, valued, and empowered. This is the true legacy of the Black Church – its sacred "paraklētic mission." This ongoing journey towards reconciliation embodies the sacred mission of the Black Church and reflects the inherent divinity within the Black Body, rooted in the *imago Dei* and *imitatio Dei*.

Chapter IV

DECOLONIZATION A THREE-PRONGED APPROACH

Goal 1: Clean Pain Sermon Series

One goal of the dissertation "Agapē: Embracing Clean Pain and Reimagining a Reconciliatory Pathway Towards Restoration of Dehumanized Black Bodies and Continued Discourse on the Decolonization of the Black Church" was the creation of a communal space centered around theological and post-human thought that attempts to move Bodies towards human wholeness through interpreting Holy texts and music through liberation theologies and process thought. I will be working with at least one of my site team members to establish a partnership with a physical location to host communal worship. Site team members will participate during worship service as members of this community. Additionally, they will also be asked to provide feedback, via a questionnaire, on each worship service. Their assistance will be crucial in assessing the potential for this new worship service to be a space that develops open communication within this newly formed community.

> Strategy 1: Create a YouTube, TikTok and Instagram community for bodies to join and gather.
> Strategy 2: Organize and create a physical space of worship in partnership with a Church.
> Strategy 3: Prepare a sermon series that articulates and expresses the agapē love.
> Strategy 4: Create a social media post to be posted in a Facebook community that promotes decolonizing the Self in the context of a Black Church.

Evaluation of Goal 1:

Community members and guests will be asked to complete a monthly questionnaire that allows them to offer feedback, critique, or suggestions. The community must grow based on its occupants, therefore monitoring the growth of members will provide information that can be

measured and evaluated.

Implementation of Goal 1:

Embarking on the implementation phase of my dissertation project on *Clean Pain*, I initially spearheaded three distinct formats to give life to the project: delivering sermons within the Black Church,[309] hosting a theology-focused podcast centered around Hip Hop Culture, and an online class dedicated to the decolonization of the Black Church and the Black Body. The entire Catholic Church,[310] specifically the segment of this religious body that holds Black Bodies, has much to do in working toward decolonizing the Black Church.[311] In doing so, and in more closely exercising and living into the agapē love[312] ethic demonstrated in the lived life of

[309] Henry Louis Gates, "The History and Importance of the Black Church," Harvard Gazette (Harvard Gazette, June 3, 2022), https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2021/03/the-history-and-importance-of-the-black-church/. For this thesis, I will identify the Black Church - Non-Denominational, Christian, and Muslim - as the cultural edifice that Black Bodies created to combat the subversive system of enslavement that sought to destroy their humanity and crush their spirit. Thus, for Black Bodies, the Black Church is a conduit of survival traced directly to the miraculous ways that our ancestors reinvented the religion of the colonizer and reclaimed a means of freedom and liberation for all oppressed Bodies. The liberatory shift in Black Bodies affirmed their and likewise our identity as divine Bodies.

[310] The term "Catholic Church" in this context draws from the Greek *katholikos*, as understood in the Apostles' Creed, signifying the universal Christian Church encompassing all believers.

[311] Francis X Rocca, "Vatican Apologizes for the Church's Historical Role in Justifying European Colonialism," The Wall Street Journal, March 30, 2023, https://www.wsj.com/articles/vatican-apologizes-for-the-churchs-historical-role-in-justifying-european-colonialism-34305e2d#. Recently the Vatican apologized for their role in aiding the European imperial capitalist system to expand throughout all the lands that are inhabited by the human race, announcing that is has officially repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery, a contentious 15th-century concept employed by European colonizers to legitimize the appropriation of Indigenous territories. Recognizing its irreconcilability with the Church's fundamental teachings on agapē love and justice, the statement also acknowledges the historical participation of the Church in colonial projects, including missions and schools that often contributed to the dispossession and cultural assimilation of Indigenous Bodies and Black Bodies. Demonstrating its commitment to reconciliation and healing, the Vatican is starting to forge partnerships with Black Bodies, supporting their healing processes, and fostering mutual understanding and respect. Deeply regretting these past failings and their association with injustices inflicted upon Indigenous communities, the Catholic Church has expressed sincere apologies.

[312] Mark Dimmock and Andrew Fisher, "Fletcher's Situation Ethics." In *Ethics for A-Level*, 1st ed., 79–90. Open Book Publishers, 2017. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1wc7r6j.9; Elaine Padilla, *Divine Enjoyment: A Theology of Passion and Exuberance* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2014), 45, 48, 51. Beyond all laws and regulations lies the transformative power of agapē love. This unconditional and expansive love flows in a reciprocal rhythm, freely uplifting and enriching all it touches. Agapē is a charitable love that moves circularly by

Yeshua, the Black Body can continue deeper in the journey towards the reconciliation of the Black Church.

While this journey of clean pain – journeying toward agapē love – has been occurring for centuries,[313] my desire to share the decolonization and reconciliation ethic in regular sermon form did not work out as expected. As I was not at that time either a senior or associate Pastor of a church, I started working with a sister church of NYTS, which had been without a Pastor for years and had asked NYTS students to fill the duties of preaching on a weekly basis. Recognizing the potential for enriching both my doctoral research on "the decolonization of the Black church" and the spiritual life of a local congregation, I engaged in fruitful dialogues with the leadership of the neighborhood's local church,[314] which was seeking a regular preacher. With a view of fostering a mutually beneficial partnership, we delineated the parameters of my preaching engagement. This framework prioritized theologically rigorous and scripturally grounded teaching, an initial trial sermon to demonstrate the biblical fidelity of my decolonization ethic, and active participation from the church leadership to fully realize this research-to-praxis endeavor.[315] This collaborative approach aimed to facilitate nine months of meaningful engagement, where my sermons resonated with the congregation while simultaneously enriching my dissertation journey.

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ascending and descending freely and generously in superabundance. The movement of agapē seeks to catch sight of the divine beauty, and ultimately attain the eternal good of the divine element in the soul by wounding the soul of the Body of God with love and kindness.

[313] My approach to decolonizing the Black Church through sermons, centered on agapē love and Jesus' example (Goal 1), draws inspiration from historical movements and contemporary actions like the Haitian Revolution, the Underground Railroad, the Black Lives Matter movement, and others explored in Goal 3.

[314] While sharing this experience, I have chosen not to identify the specific congregation to remain focused on the broader thematic discussion.

[315] To address the data requirements of my *Clean Pain* research project, I sought both quantitative and qualitative data through two complementary strategies. First, with the church leadership's support, I integrated brief survey questions into my sermons, allowing congregants to anonymously provide valuable qualitative feedback. Second, I requested copies of recorded sermons to analyze content and demonstrate the connection between my decolonizing approach and my dissertation project.

However, as enthusiastic as the church leaders and members were when I came and preached,[316] I did not receive any of the promised audio or video recordings from the church, and I received very few surveys after my sermons.[317] Driven by a zeal for decolonization and reconciliation, I mistakenly launched into sermons centered on agapē love and Yeshua's example, overlooking the crucial foundation of trust and openness within the congregation. In essence, I, a stranger to their hearts and minds, attempted to reshape their theology without first earning their confidence to embark on such a vulnerable journey. In hindsight, I mirrored the very patterns of exclusion I sought to dismantle, resembling the "Master" evangelizing to the unconverted. This was a stark illustration of Matthew 7:3,[318] the egregious log in my own eye obscuring my vision and hindering authentic connection.

- Enjoy Your Sabbath: Rest is Holy
    - Taken from Hebrews 4: 1-11, with the theme that we need to follow the Sabbath and keep it Holy, one of the main factors in which we can keep the Sabbath Holy is by resting, because all of creation benefits from resting.
- 2 Sides of The Line
    - Taken from John 7: 53-8:11, the sermon "2 Sides of The Line" was initially delivered via Zoom in October 2022. However, due to unforeseen technical difficulties that compromised audio clarity, the church leadership and I

[316] While aiming to gather both quantitative and qualitative data from congregants during my dissertation research, the overall congregation's positive reception was evident. This was reflected in post-sermon comments, repeat invitations, and even a request for a re-preaching due to technical difficulties. However, despite initial promises, I ultimately received no audio or video recordings and limited survey responses.

[317] The dissertation's appendix B provides a comprehensive list of all sermons referenced within the work.

[318] And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying to your friend, 'Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye (Matthew 7: 3-5 NLT).

collaboratively agreed to present the sermon again in November 2022, this time in person, to ensure its full impact on the congregation. This repetition allowed for a more engaged and enriching reception of the message, which explored the theme of choosing between judgment and grace, embodied in the story of the woman caught in adultery and Jesus' response to her accusers.

- HOPE in the Midst of Chaos
    - Taken from Zephaniah 3:14-20, with the theme that "hope" is a gift from God.
- Do Not Fear
    - Taken from Mark 4:35-41, with the theme that we can stand in our faith and not fear because of God's grace, mercy, and love towards us; and because of the example left for us by Jesus' lived life.
- Return to God's Glory
    - Taken from Exodus 34:29-35, with the theme that while the Church - the individual and the composite - has been influenced by colonialism, imperialism, and racism, it is being called back to God's glory by living into and stepping in the radically inclusive love of God.
- Greater Things: Hallelujah, I Am Wonderful
    - Taken from Exodus 34:29-35, with the theme each member of the human family is wonderful and can-do greater things because each and every one of us is made in the image of God.

While the sermon series on decolonization and reconciliation within the Black Church did not generate the desired research outcomes, I remain steadfast in my belief that such transformation is possible within the Church. The key shortcomings I encountered stemmed from

my planning and implementation of the project, particularly regarding the lack of pre-existing community and trust within the congregation. Had I been more deeply embedded in the church community, through consistent engagement and relationship-building, I believe the research process and its outcomes would have been significantly enhanced.

This experience underscores the crucial role of community and trust in facilitating meaningful engagement with sensitive topics like decolonization. Pre-existing relationships provide a foundation of rapport and transparency, allowing participants to feel more comfortable sharing their experiences and perspectives, particularly when dealing with potentially vulnerable or sensitive topics. This, in turn, enriches the quality and depth of both qualitative and quantitative data, which are essential components of most dissertation research.

While the lack of a pre-existing community hindered the research aspect of this project, the sermon series itself provided invaluable learning opportunities within the context of decolonizing the Black Church. The positive feedback and encouragement I received from congregants, including their reflections on the need for personal change, confirmed the value and relevance of this work.

This experience reaffirms my commitment to the ongoing journey of decolonizing the Black Church, ultimately leading to reconciliation and healing for the Black Body. Moving forward, I recognize the importance of prioritizing community engagement and relationship-building as foundational elements in facilitating meaningful dialogue and transformation. Additionally, I will prioritize centering my sermons on agapē love and Yeshua's example, while fostering a crucial foundation of trust and openness within the congregation. This ensures that I earn their confidence before embarking on such a vulnerable journey. Additionally, mindful of

Jesus' words in Matthew 7:3-5, I continually self-examine to ensure my perspective is not clouded, allowing for authentic connection within the community.

Goal 2: Hip-Hop and Theology

Goal two was to create a podcast that invites spiritual seekers to embark on a journey of self-discovery, fostering a deeper connection with a relational God: A relational God who continually reveals God-Self to humanity as we grow into a closer relationship with ourselves and with God.

Strategy 1: Create a podcast using YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Spotify. Later as the community grows the community will be transitioned to Mighty Networks an online community holding hub.
Strategy 2: Organize and create a guest list for the podcast.
Strategy 3: Prepare exegesis research on selected Hip Hop music.

Evaluation of Goal 2:

This will be one of the more difficult goals to evaluate. We will look at our relationship with our audience and identify the listener base. We will look to see if our listeners witness or experience the relational Divine while listening to the podcast. Additionally, we will look for acknowledgment by guests and the audience that the podcast is a safe space where these Bodies can listen, share, ask questions, give suggestions, and bring their whole Selves into each episode.

Implementation of Goal 2:

One of the key components of included in the Hip Hop and Theology (HHT) podcast as one of the backdrops through which my dissertation project journeyed is its invitation to its listeners to experience a relational God. And I believe that Hip-Hop music is an art form that can be used to exegete, or interpret, God, Theology, and Spirituality for Black Bodies. James Hal

Cone,[319] defines them, Black Bodies as a socio-political identity shaped by oppression and not just a racial category. Within this context, Hip-Hop's ability to explore spirituality offers solace and empowers Black Bodies to find liberation and a connection with God within their own unique contexts. God and humanities theology. Hip-hop music has long served as a powerful tool for self-expression and empowerment among marginalized communities.

Through its artistic elements and lyrical content, hip-hop has provided a platform to challenge societal norms, shed light on social issues, and reflect the lived experiences of those who often find themselves on the fringes of society. Culturally, hip-hop is deeply rooted in the experiences of African Americans and other marginalized communities, reflecting their struggles, aspirations, and resilience in an empirical world where everything is dominated by colonialism. By embracing the cultural nuances and authentic voices within hip-hop, the artists featured in HHT connected with their audience and conveyed spiritual messages in a way that resonates deeply with many Black Bodies. Similarly, the songs featured on HHT both through poetry and innuendo advocated for social justice by addressing systemic oppression. My intention for HHT, informed by liberation theology and process thought, was to consider artists who explored and amplified narratives of God as a force that stands with the marginalized, perpetually challenging injustice and promoting equality and inclusivity. While this resonated deeply with many Black listeners, inspiring self-worth, resistance against oppression, and action towards a just society, the impact undoubtedly varied due to the diverse lived experiences and expectations of individual listeners. This dissertation further investigates the potential of Hip-Hop and Theology (HHT) as a platform for vivid theological exploration and spiritual empowerment within a podcast dedicated to Hip-Hop culture.

[319] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 30, 64.

Informed by James Cone's concept of Black Bodies, I posit that HHT's innovative approach of employing Hip-Hop music as a tool for exegesis offers a unique avenue for Black Bodies to engage with God, spirituality, and one another. This engagement fosters a journey towards reconciliation, echoing the prophetic call for "justice to roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24, NIV)." Through a close analysis of selected HHT episodes, I demonstrate how the podcast's format and content cultivate relational experiences of God, advocate for social justice, and empower Black listeners, ultimately contributing to their spiritual and communal well-being.

HHT, as a podcast, was efficacious in sharing and portraying the concept of the Most Divine, depicting a relational God who continually reveals Godself to humanity as we develop closer relationships with ourselves and with God.[320] However, as I review this segment of my Clean Pain dissertation project, HHT is currently on sabbatical. Two main factors led to HHT's hiatus in August. Firstly, although the podcast generated substantial content and elicited listener feedback through face-to-face interactions, there was no effective means to quantitatively assess the sentiments of our audience, as they often refrained from leaving online feedback. Secondly, following my appointment as an Associate Pastor at a church, HHT was approached to collaborate with the church in producing and recording its podcast on-site.

[320] Lopez-Joël Dautruche and Aaron C. Waldron, eds., "Hip Hop and Theology - Channel Analytics," YouTube: Hip Hop and Theology, 2024, https://studio.youtube.com/channel/UCvItjWkrHt0YYZXpBGAmY_Q/analytics/tab-content/period-default; Lopez-Joël Dautruche and Aaron C. Waldron, eds., "Hip Hop and Theology - Audience Analytics," YouTube: Hip Hop And Theology, 2024, https://studio.youtube.com/channel/UCvItjWkrHt0YYZXpBGAmY_Q/analytics/tab-build_audience/period-default.

Figure 5 HHT Subscribers, Views, and Impressions

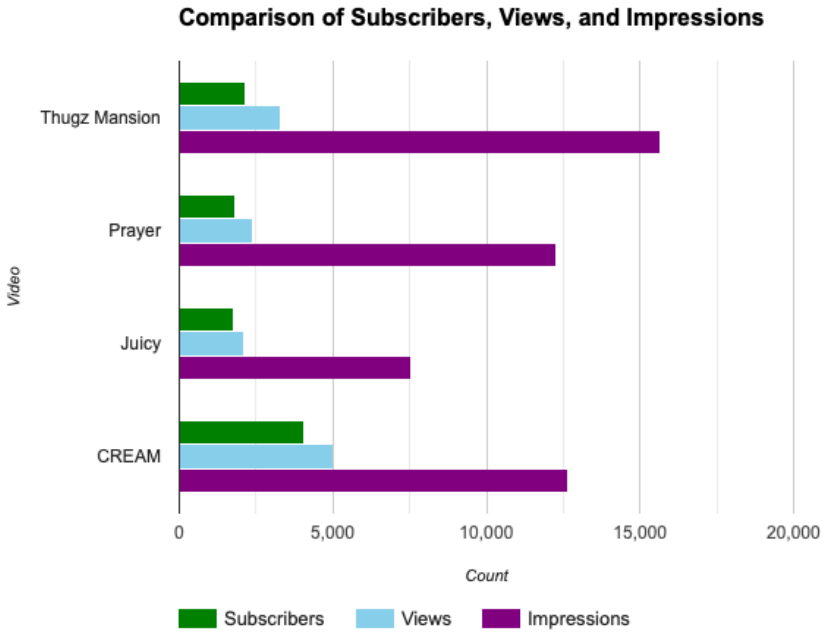


Figure 3 HHT Watch Time

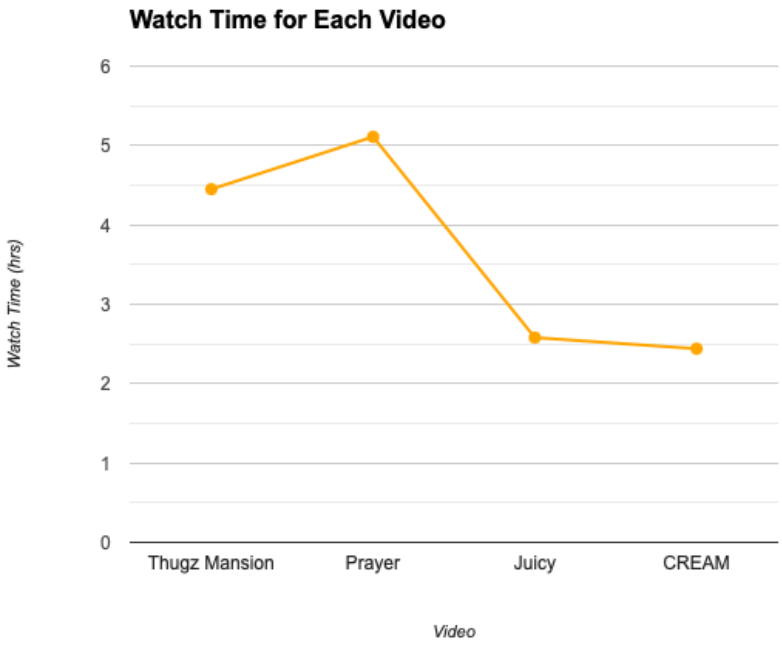
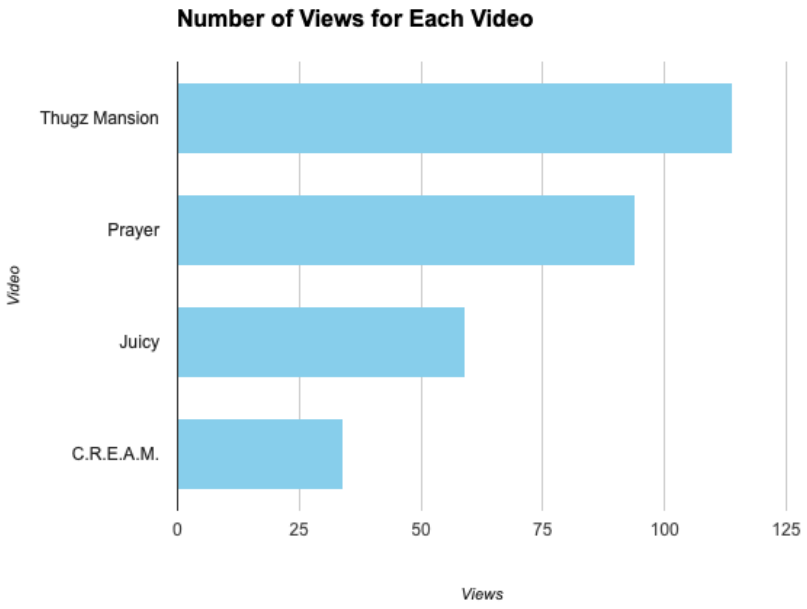


Figure 7 HHT Number of Views



Since June 2023, HHT has released 4 of episodes.

- Thugz Mansion, Tupac:[321]
    - Guests in dialogue for this episode of HHT included Nnabu Gogoh,[322] JP Reynolds,[323] Aaron Waldron,[324] and me. Tupac's "Thugz Mansion" proved a poignant starting point for this season's exploration of the decolonization and

[321] L. Joël Dautruche et al., "Hip-Hop & Theology: 'Thugz Mansion' - Tupac," YouTube, June 18, 2023, https://youtu.be/NmXUxfxIL1k.

[322] Nnabu has been a recurring guest of HHT since 2021 and is a lover of Old School Hip Hop. He holds a Master of Divinity degree from New York Theological Seminary and is currently pursuing his Doctor of Ministry at Drew University.

[323] JP is an innovative storyteller, abolitionist, artist, rapper, songwriter, and man of faith. JP holds a Master of Divinity degree from Yale University, and approaches work with a lens of liberation, as a part of his commitment to social justice. This social justice lens is paired with faith and influences JP's individual activism work in the community.

[324] Aaron has been a co-host, producer, editor, and marketing director of HHT since its introductory episode in 2020 they are the epitome of an artist, currently focusing on Theo-Poetics and Theo-Films. Aaron holds a Master of Divinity degree from New York Theological Seminary and is currently in the last semester of their Doctoral of Ministry with a Multi-Faith concentration.

reconciliation of the Black Body and the Black Church. Each panel member, deeply familiar with the theological richness of Tupac's music, contributed insightful perspectives. This resulted in a vibrant discussion where, despite diverse interpretations of "Thugz Mansion" as storytelling, prayerful yearning, introspective reflection, and redemptive quest, a common thread emerged. All identified the song's depiction of a "Thugz Mansion" – akin to Heaven, Nirvana, or Enlightenment – as a fluid, intertwined space where marginalized figures find sanctuary. Significantly, Tupac's lyrics naturally transition to a theology of the outcast, challenging traditional religious hierarchies that relegate the "thug" [325] to a lower caste than even the already marginalized Black Body. This shift, mirroring Tupac's own movement in the song, prompted the panel to delve deeper into the complex question of inclusion and theological space for marginalized groups within spiritual utopias. We seemed to agree with Tupac's intonations that life right now is hell, so let's focus on the here and now. I became so transparent in this conversation and so did JP, Aaron, and Gogoh and it felt to me like we are reaching our goal of sharing the Gospel[326] differently. The thought that other Black Bodies have gone through and are currently going through the same situations, happenings, experiences, and thoughts – within Thugz Mansion – sounded like listening to the gospel to us. Both spiritual and theological conversation during the recording caused each of the guests' imaginations to move like an artist or a Prophet, because we are seeing a place beyond the oppression

[325] THUG is a reference to one of Tupac's tattoos, "THUG LIFE," meant as a symbol of the stark contrast between the perspectives of White Bodies and Black Bodies regarding Black Bodies. In the tattoo, THUG LIFE is an acronym for "The Hate U Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody."

[326] The "good news" of the kin-dom of the Most Divine.

that we, as Black Bodies, face daily. This shift in our conversation, and in our understanding of what many conservative believers may call bad or evil, demonstrated the "so many ways we can come or go to God."[327] Finally, we noted that Tupac features us - Black Bodies - in the way we want to be depicted, a place to reveal and be our whole Selves in our "heaven."

- Prayer, Rick Ro$$:[328]
    - Guests in dialogue for this episode of HHT included Kid Lacey,[329] Aaron Waldron, and me. The recording of "Prayer" held immense personal significance, coinciding with the devastating kidnapping of two of my uncles in Haiti. During this period of profound captivity, prayer emerged as the sole pillar of strength and solace for myself and my family. Amidst the pervasive cultural narrative of self-reliance, it was through fervent prayer that we found the resilience and unity to navigate the harrowing ordeal. This brought us to the sentiment of finding peace within prayer, even amid learning how to pray correctly for ourselves. How prayer can be done in a way that is different from what our empirical Christian tradition tells us is the "proper" way to communicate with the Most Divine Being. There is no specific code or language that all Bodies, and specifically Black Bodies, can plug into when praying, and Rick Ro$$'s song Prayer is a step into a

[327] From one ancestor he made all peoples to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps fumble about for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us (Acts 17:26-28 NRSV). You need to know that I have other sheep in addition to those in this pen. I need to gather and bring them, too. They'll also recognize my voice. Then it will be one flock, one Shepherd (John 10:16 MSG).

[328] L. Joël Dautruche, Aaron Waldron, and Kid Lacey, "Hip-Hop & Theology: 'Prayer,'" YouTube, July 16, 2023, https://youtu.be/SofAw_Xq39M.

[329] Kid Lacey is an emcee, songwriter, and producer who has had a love for music since he was able to sing in his church choir. However, he specifically became enamored with Hip-Hop after hearing "Gold Digger". "The Kid" has adopted similar elements into his style: fresh artistic interventions, old school influence, performative satire, lyrical storytelling, and an unmatched degree of creativity.

different way of gaining access to God in prayer. Ro$$ allows his listeners to understand that prayer is a conversation between the individual and God, and when having a conversation with another individual, it is two-sided; the prayer has a chance to talk, but they must also take the time not only to hear but to listen to the ushering of the Most Divine in their lives. And as we learn to both talk and listen to God, we can start to reconnect to the original source; connect to ourselves and God, by being consistent in our faith and in the ways in which we communicate with God.

- Juicy, The Notorious BIG:[330]
    - Guests in dialogue for this episode of HHT included Kid Lacey, JP Reynolds, Nnabu Gogoh, Aaron Waldron, and me. To start off the recording, I immediately associated the lyrics of Juicy with a notable quote found in King's *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*: "Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever; the yearning for freedom eventually manifests itself. Freedom is never given voluntarily by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed."[331] From the introduction of Juicy, there was some disagreement as to how theological Christopher George Latore Wallace is. We ponder if Biggie is just telling us his life story or is it more than just "a story." Is this a story of redemption, moving from rags to riches, from unwanted to chosen by God - we find it dedicated to all those who wanted to keep this Black Body oppressed. A shift towards seeing Juicy as biblical when JP mentioned that scripture is "descriptive not

[330] L. Joël Dautruche et al., "Hip-Hop & Theology: 'Juicy,'" YouTube, August 16, 2023, https://youtu.be/3E2SuHDnk9k.

[331] Jr. King, Martin Luther., Luther King, Jr. Martin. Letter from the Birmingham Jail. N.p.: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017.

prescriptive." From there, nudged by a comment from Nnabu, we started to look at Biggie as if he were Moses of the Pentateuch, the Moses that once lived in exile, and could only dream about being free and having his people come with him and living the life that they were supposed to be living - living free. Juicy can effectively be Biggie's Exodus narrative. Another parallel was brought up with Biggie and Abraham. Abraham, the "father" of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity starts off as a non-believer - or a believer in multiple gods. And while other parallels were drawn to different Biblical characters and Prophets, the group shifted its focus to how Juicy is a narrative of redemption: "It was once this way and now it is this way, and we are celebrating (22:30)." Additionally, the chorus about knowing who you are, was seen as a connection between "me" and my ancestors, speaking to the core of who you are. The return to the core of who you are anointed by God to be is prophetical. The samples that Biggie uses - similarly parallels the way in which Yeshua spoke as Yeshua often repeated things that were said before - which is what happens in the hook and chorus of Juicy.

- C.R.E.A.M. (Cash Rules Everything Around Me), Wu-Tang Clan[332]
    - In this episode of Hip Hop and Theology, our dynamic panel, featuring Mo Fathelbab,[333] Roosevelt Sheriff,[334] Nnabu Gogoh, Aaron Waldron, and myself,

[332] L. Joël Dautruche et al., "Hip-Hop & Theology: 'C.R.E.A.M.,'" YouTube, September 14, 2023, https://youtu.be/IE27T91R-YM.

[333] Mo is currently a Real Estate Agent but has written for and acted in several films and nationally known comedy shows. Mo is also a music enthusiast. Mo was specifically brought in to speak theologically from a Muslim perspective.

[334] Roosevelt, formerly of the Boogie Boys signed to Capitol Records, rose to prominence with the top hit "Fly Girl" in 1985. A passionate aficionado of hip-hop music, he is also a composer and producer who has collaborated with artists such as Jay-Z. Additionally, Roosevelt holds a Master of Divinity degree and currently serves as an Associate Pastor, while maintaining his enduring love for hip-hop music.

engage in a compelling dialogue dissecting the profound narrative of Wu-Tang Clan's iconic track, “C.R.E.A.M. (Cash Rules Everything Around Me).” This episode delves into the intersection of hip-hop, theology, and the human experience, illustrating how the narratives within rap tracks like “C.R.E.A.M.” provide a lens through which we can examine, critique, and ultimately challenge the structures that govern our lives as we navigate the intricate layers of this timeless track, uncovering the theological undercurrents that make it a powerful anthem of resilience, redemption, and the pursuit of a better life. Roosevelt’s introspective exploration into his departure from the rap game sets the stage for a thought-provoking discussion on the systemic inequities within the music industry, mirroring larger colonial structures. This segues seamlessly into a broader conversation about the transformative power embedded in Hip-Hop music, culture, and theology as tools for dismantling colonial systems and advancing justice. The essence of “C.R.E.A.M.” is then explored, revealing its dual significance - both material and spiritual. The song’s inception, rooted in the struggle of growing up with limited resources, resonates with the experience of many, particularly immigrants facing early-life challenges. The lure of the streets symbolized as “the game,” becomes a palpable option when one is confronted with limited choices and a desire for a better life. The journey from adversity to self-improvement is likened to a theological shift, echoing the rebirth found in Psalm 22. The profound concept of being “alive on arrival” mirrors the biblical notion that even in moments of divine abandonment, there is an underlying purpose a deliverance that emerges from the struggle. As “C.R.E.A.M.” narrates

the arduous path to a better life, reminiscent of fumbling in darkness and enduring the inevitable bumps and bruises, a parallel is drawn to the transformative process described in Psalm 23. Here, the valley moments are illuminated with the assurance that, just as in the Psalm, a guiding force is present during life's most challenging phases. In the end, we arrived at the thought that while the recordings of Hip-Hop Theology (HHT) generated rich theological and theopoetic conversations as we exegeted both Hip-Hop verses and Holy Texts, a core ambiguity remained: who constituted our intended audience? Although viewership data is available (see Figures 5, 6, 7), engagement was limited to a handful of likes on HHT's YouTube page. This lack of interaction rendered HHT's initial aim of becoming a self-contained community, suitable for analysis within this dissertation, unfulfilled. Additionally, it is imperative to acknowledge that while I assert that Hip-Hop and Theology represents a form of God-talk, I also maintain that for this form of theological discourse to be considered "theology," the study of God, I, as the host of HHT, and participants involved during the recording of the podcast, must adjust to transition from a space of social commentary to a forum wherein all participants engage in theological inquiry. Moving forward, HHT will dedicate episodes to exploring specific theological themes and concepts found both in scripture and Hip-Hop. These themes may include love, grace, suffering, forgiveness, and redemption within Hip-Hop music and culture. Furthermore, we will actively encourage listeners to participate in theological dialogue and reflection by inviting them to share their thoughts, questions, and experiences related to the intersection of Hip-Hop and

> theology. To facilitate deeper understanding, we will provide resources such as recommended readings, theological texts, articles, and multimedia content that illuminate the theological dimensions of Hip-Hop culture and its implications for faith and spirituality. Despite this unexpected outcome, my passion for exploring the spiritual and theological dimensions of marginalized and stigmatized spaces remains undiminished. Therefore, I am committed to fostering the potential for an HHT community, albeit in a form different from the original conception.

The potential for a reimagined production of the "Hip Hop & Theology" (HHT) podcast is nearing fruition. As I transitioned into the role of Associate Pastor at my church, I was presented with the intriguing opportunity to integrate the HHT podcast into the community outreach programs associated with my position. This innovative approach aimed to share a message of love and reconciliation beyond the confines of the church building. However, it is important to acknowledge that the integration of a hip-hop-centered podcast within a traditional religious setting may not resonate with all audiences. Therefore, HHT remains a work in progress, constantly evolving to bridge the gap between seemingly disparate worlds.

Goal 3: Clean Pain Class

The third goal in my dissertation project was to create an online course that invites people to experience a relational God: A God who continually reveals God-Self to humanity as we grow into a closer relationship with ourselves and with God. I worked with members of my site team to help develop a short beta course that will hopefully be used as a template to develop a course suitable for the public. Site team members participated, as members of this community, in the

beta course. Additionally, site team members who were present were asked to provide feedback, via questionnaire, on each class. Their assistance was crucial in assessing and implementing any necessary developments in the course.[335]

Strategy 1: Create a curriculum and rubric for a multi-faith course.
Strategy 2: Set up an online course.
Strategy 3: Implement the course.

Evaluation of Goal 3:

Students will be asked to complete a pre-course and post-course questionnaire and complete a pre-course and post-course test that allows the students to observe and compare their understanding of decolonization and re-creation of the Black Church before the course and after completing the course. A post-course evaluation will offer the opportunity for students to share their feedback, critiques, and suggestions on their experience during the course.

Implementation of Goal 3:

Mirroring the successes of the "Hip Hop and Theology" podcast and the "Clean Pain" sermon series, my attempt to introduce students to the Decolonization of the Black Body and Black Church encountered both triumphs and challenges. Initially, in collaboration with my dedicated site team, we crafted a concise beta class. This later evolved into a comprehensive online course designed to nurture a transformative experience of a relational God for Black Bodies. However, when I assumed the role of Pastor of Church Life and Community

[335] Given the multi-faith composition of my Doctor of Ministry cohort, the "Black Church: White Religion" class (designed for goal 3) aimed to bridge the gap between students of diverse religious or spiritual backgrounds, including both those with identical belief systems and those open to exploring the value of other traditions. By fostering an environment of inclusivity and mutual respect, the course sought to promote understanding, dialogue, and cooperation among individuals of different faiths.

Engagement – the Church's face to the community – significant shifts became necessary. The "Clean Pain" class unexpectedly presented an opportunity: actual members of the same church community, actively engaged in reconciling their identities as Black Bodies with the Church's identity as a Black Church, expressed interest in participating. This led us to reconsider the online format and explore a live setting. As the online class transitioned into a component of the Church's Spiritual Formation Classes, ensuring each session was firmly grounded in biblical texts became paramount. The focus shifted to aligning the curriculum with the teachings of Yeshua and his embodied decolonization praxis during his ministry as a Black Body within the context of the Pax Romana.[336]

Before notifying congregants and members of the broader community, the course name was revised to "Black Church, White Religion: The Decolonization of the Black Church."[337] This change acknowledged the apprehension expressed by some church leaders regarding the potentially charged terms "clean pain," "decolonization," and "reconciliation." During the transformative journey of the course, students explored embracing their inherent divine wholeness and cultivating a heightened spiritual consciousness. By shedding deeply ingrained personal and religious paradigms, they discovered that even the smallest release from embedded colonial ideologies could lead to liberation. This newfound freedom encompassed the boundless love of *agapē*, defined by Yeshua as "neighbor," extending both inwardly and outwardly.

In seeking to define the concept of "neighbor" for the class, I focused on two scriptures

[336] Terje Stenberg, thesis, *The Christianization of the Roman Empire from Jesus to Constantine* (University of Oslo Library, 2020), http://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-87398. The Pax Romana, a two-century era of Roman history often hailed as a golden age, witnessed increased and sustained imperialism alongside relative peace and order, prosperous stability, and hegemonic power. This period also saw significant regional expansion.

[337] The title of the class was changed to "Black Church, White Religion" after one of my colleagues suggested that when advertising the class to church members, the title "Clean Pain: Decolonizing the Church, a Reconciliatory Path" might be too intricate and difficult for congregants to grasp and decide to participate in the class without further explanation.

from the Gospel of Mark[338] and the Gospel of Luke.[339] The former was addressed to a "Jewish"[340] audience, representing the Church, while the latter was directed towards the "Gentiles" [341] – individuals not adhering to the religious norms established by or associated with imperial traditions. In Aramaic, the likely language Yeshua spoke, the phrase "love your neighbor as yourself" might have been expressed using the word "qerev (קֶרֶב)," [342] which conveys a broader meaning of neighbor, encompassing anybody in your vicinity, potentially even strangers. It is important to note that Yeshua spoke these words in a cultural context that included a diverse mix of people living under Roman rule, and as a Body deeply influenced by Jewish traditions and a community which faced challenges related to religious practices, social dynamics, and Roman authority. In his advocacy for loving one's neighbor, scholars such as David Tiede posit that Yeshua likely had in mind the commandment found in the Pentateuch,

[338] One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these (Mark 12: 28b-31 NRSV)."

[339] An expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live (Luke 10: 25-28 NRSV).

[340] Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001). Mark's use of Torah references in his apocalyptic discourse through the lens of Jewish temple traditions and expectations, along with his Jesus as the fulfillment of Jewish Messianic prophecies and expectations, demonstrates that Mark was writing to a Jewish audience. familiar with these tongues.

[341] Justo L. González, *The Story Luke Tells: Luke's Unique Witness to the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015). Unlike the more complex Hebrew-influenced Greek of Matthew and Mark, Luke's language is simpler and more accessible, reflecting the broader Greco-Roman world. Luke focuses on themes such as universal salvation, mercy, and social justice, resonating with the concerns of unchurched Gentiles seeking spiritual meaning beyond traditional structures. The term "unchurched" here refers to those who do not adhere to the religious norms established by or associated with imperial traditions. Furthermore, Luke prominently features Gentile figures like Cornelius and the Samaritan woman, underscoring their inclusion in Jesus' message and appealing to unchurched Gentiles seeking a more personal connection with the divine (Luke 7:36-50, 10:25-37, Acts 10). Finally, Luke emphasizes Jesus' mission to all nations, signaling a departure from the emphasis on Jewish particularism found in other Gospels (Luke 24:47).

[342] Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, eds., "Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon to the Old Testament," Internet Archive, January 1, 1994, https://archive.org/details/BDBHebrewLexicon.

which states, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord (Leviticus 19:18, NRSV)."[343] While loving your neighbor existed in Jewish tradition primarily as applied to fellow Israelites,[344] Yeshua's radical new teachings embodied in – love and compassion,[345] the kin-dom of God,[346] and transformation and renewal[347] – challenged the prevailing colonial religious system of his time. This challenge stemmed from his redefinition of "neighbor." The pre-existing understanding of "neighbor" during Jesus' time was it limited to family, tribe, or specific communities expanding it beyond the confines of family and tribe to encompass all individuals, regardless of ethnic, social, or religious affiliation. For example, Yeshua's parable of the Good Samaritan shatters the narrow definition of "neighbor" held by the lawyer who questions Yeshua. A Samaritan, considered an outsider and enemy by Jews, demonstrates true neighborly love by helping the wounded traveler, surpassing the actions of a priest and Levite, traditionally seen as paragons of

[343] David L. Tiede, *Luke: Books of Faith Series* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2011). Various scholars and theologians argue that Jesus's command to love one's neighbor is deeply rooted in the teachings of the Torah, particularly in Leviticus 19:18, emphasizing the continuity between Jesus' teachings and the Jewish tradition.

[344] Carson Cope, "'If God Is for Us Who Can Be Against Us?': Southerners, Abolitionists, Slavery, and the Quest for God's Approval in Pre-Civil War America," *Graduate Theses*, 52, May 4, 2017, https://digitalcommons.winthrop.edu/graduatetheses/52?utm_source=digitalcommons.winthrop.edu%2Fgraduatetheses%2F52&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages.

[345] Arguably, agapē love sits at the heart of Jesus' message. He emphasized love for God, embodied in complete devotion and obedience, and love for others. For example, his healing of the sick, including lepers and those possessed by demons, demonstrates his care for the marginalized and suffering.

[346] The Kingdom of God is also central to Jesus' teachings, representing a realm of God's rule characterized by justice, peace, and reconciliation. One of Yeshua's parables states: "The kin-dom of heaven (God) is like yeast that a woman took and hid in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened (Matthew 13:33 NRSV)." This is a call for the Body of God to live according to its principles, focusing on inner transformation and ethical living rather than external rituals or structures. Yeshua affirms that this kin-dom is accessible to all, regardless of their background. And Yeshua's embodiment of its values in his own life and ministry, left an example for us to follow today.

[347] Yeshua challenged the status quo and emphasized the need for personal and communal transformation. He called for repentance and conversion, not just from outward sins but also from inner attitudes of pride, selfishness, and judgment. Yeshua's encounters with those engaging in problematic past actions or choices, such as Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) and the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), show his willingness to offer forgiveness to those who repent. His own actions, demonstrate the depth of his commitment to forgiveness and reconciliation. This emphasis on renewal aligns with the kin-dom of God and suggests a continuous journey of growth and becoming more like God.

religious duty. Yeshua's response, "Go and do likewise," is a call for all to extend compassion beyond their usual circles (Luke 10:37 NRSV). Yeshua goes to the extent of even including outsiders and enemies as our neighbors.[348] This teaching challenged conventional norms for in a culture marked by prejudice and segregation, Yeshua's words demanded love and respect for everyone, regardless of their background or social standing, and emphasized the importance of compassion and communal harmony.[349] While theologians such as Cone,[350] Bonhoeffer,[351] Brueggemann,[352] have explored the ethical implications of loving one's neighbor as oneself (Mark 12: 30-31 NRSV), the embodied life and teachings of Yeshua provide the most definitive example of this principle. Loving your neighbor in as Yeshua has exhorted us to do, necessitates prioritizing their needs over one's own, constituting a radical act of selflessness and social justice.

When developing the curriculum for this class, my site team and I recognized the importance of establishing a foundational understanding of the term "colonization" before delving into discussions about decolonization. Therefore, we prioritized defining the concept of colonization as a crucial initial step in our curriculum development process. Highlighting the parallels between a Colonized Church and an abusive family, we aim to illustrate how both entities perpetuate patterns of harm and abuse. Often, the resistance to breaking free from these patterns stems from the fear and discomfort associated with venturing into the unfamiliar and

[348] You're familiar with the old written law, 'Love your friend,' and its unwritten companion, 'Hate your enemy.' I'm challenging that. I'm telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the supple moves of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves. This is what God does. He gives his best—the sun to warm and the rain to nourish—to everyone, regardless: the good and bad, the nice and nasty (Matthew 5:43–45 MSG).

[349] Nicholas Thomas Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).

[350] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 1989.

[351] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1995).

[352] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997).

unknown space of "un-hurt" – namely healing and liberation. As Yeshua aptly expressed, it is truly "easier to gallop a camel through a needle's eye than for the rich, those entrenched in colonial thinking and patterns symbolized by the metaphorical "White Body,"[353] to enter God's kin-dom[354] (Matthew 19:23-24 MSG)." In *The Prophetic Imagination*, Brueggemann sees the parable as a challenge to the privileged to share their resources with the marginalized. He emphasizes the injustice inherent in excessive wealth concentration, highlighting the need for solidarity and redistribution.[355] Thus, it becomes a critique of systemic inequalities and a call for radical transformation. With this understanding, we transitioned to a segment of the class that explored a profound psycho-spiritual progression. This phase provided an opportunity for the class to discern the areas where the Black Body and the Black Church have already begun their journey away from the foreboding and oppressive colonial world system. To illustrate this journey towards decolonization of the Black Church, we examined the works of poets and theologians who eloquently expressed messages of love and freedom. Additionally, we explored the principles of liberation theology that aligned with this transformative decolonizing movement.

Central to the quest for a decolonized Black Body and a decolonized Black Church was

[353] James Hal Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2005). Confronted by the stark metaphor of the camel and the needle's eye, Yeshua's teachings expose the inherent paradox faced by those entrenched within systems of racial hierarchy, economic exploitation, and colonial mentalities. To embrace true discipleship and participate in God's liberating work, these individuals must engage in radical self-examination, confront the idols of wealth and supremacy that ensnare them, and transcend the barriers of privilege through acts of solidarity with the marginalized, relinquishing their advantages and embracing the demands of a just and equitable world. Also, please reference the glossary for how "White Bodies" is being defined for this dissertation.

[354] Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 1974; Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 2010; Cobb and Griffin, *Process* Theology, 1999. As referenced in chapter two, the use of "kin-dom" embodies a deliberate theological stance prioritizing dismantling oppressive structures and crafting communities rooted in justice, equality, and shared responsibility, ultimately emphasizing liberation from all forms of domination.

[355] Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2001; Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 2008.

the utilization of the Christian Bible to exemplify the concept of God's continuous process of transformation. The Bible tells of a God that had revealed GodSelf[356] to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as *El Shaddai* - "בְּאֵל."[357] It is this same "בְּאֵל," who later revealed GodSelf to Moses as "יְהוָה."[358] And it is this same God that is always re-revealing GodSelf to us daily, that will be used as a way to establish what decolonization is and use this understanding of decolonization, as a lens to recognize what decolonization looked like historically, and as a lens to look at Holy Texts.

In working to discover what we as Black Bodies and as the Black Church have missed in our relationship with God because of the sting of decolonization, we can start to discover what decolonization - or Heaven - looks like in our lives. The process of reaching a reconciliatory state with God, which can be likened to our arrival at a sacred space divinely prepared for us by the Most Divine when we were formed before we were in the womb (Jeremiah 1:5 MSG), has often been referred to by the Black Church as "Heaven." In our final session, I intended to explore the concept of reconciliation through the lens of envisioning what Heaven might look like for the Black Body and the Black Church.

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[356] Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration 37," ed. Kevin Knight, trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow, CHURCH FATHERS: Oration 37 (Gregory Nazianzen), 2024, https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310237.htm; Johnson, *She Who Is*, 2018; Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 2010). In this dissertation, the term "GodSelf" is employed to articulate the theological understanding that God transcends gender binaries, embodying a divine essence that surpasses human categories and encompasses boundless diversity. This term serves as a theological placeholder, acknowledging the limitations of language to fully encapsulate the ineffable nature of the Divine. The use of "GodSelf" aligns with biblical perspectives that portray God beyond gender-specific attributes. God has shared from pre-literate times that "I AM WHO I AM (Exodus 3:14 NRSV)." Further, Theologians throughout history in grappling to articulate the expansiveness of God's identity remark that, the Most Divine's nature is not confined by human constructs, but in its essence transcends and encompasses all such distinctions.

[357] I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob (Israel) as God Almighty [El Shaddai] (Exodus 6: 3a AMP).

[358] God said to Moses, "I Am Who I Am [YHWH] (Exodus 3: 14a AMP)."

During the initial week of our class, all of the participants in the Black Church, White Religion class dedicated our focus to exploring the concept of decolonization: What is meant by decolonization? In collaboration with my site team, I developed an insightful aperçu on defining decolonization, drawing inspiration from passages such as Psalm 80[359] and Isaiah 61.[360] These Holy Texts were intertwined with quotes from theologians with a liberationist perspective[361] on how "Blackness, Oppression, and Ghetto are Intertwined."[362] For me, Blackness, oppression, and the ghetto are intertwined due to their shared history and the lived experiences of Black Bodies. Moreover, the intertwining of Blackness, oppression, and the ghetto transcends solely material conditions. It reflects a struggle for recognition, agency, and spiritual liberation in the face of systemic dehumanization. The ghetto becomes a symbol of the existential consequences of oppression, where even the "deepest truths" of marginalized individuals can be obscured.

[359] God-of-the-Angel-Armies, come back! Smile your blessing smile: That will be our salvation. Remember how you brought a young vine from Egypt, cleared out the brambles and briers and planted your very own vineyard? You prepared the good earth; you planted her roots deep; the vineyard filled the land. Your vine soared high and shaded the mountains, even dwarfing the giant cedars Your vine ranged west to the Sea, east to the River So why do you no longer protect your vine? Trespassers pick its grapes at will; Wild pigs crash through and crush it, and the mice nibble away at what's left. God-of-the-Angel-Armies, turn our way. Take a good look at what's happened and attend to this vine. Care for what you once tenderly planted the vine you raised from a shoot. And those who dared to set it on fire give them a look that will kill! Then take the hand of your once-favorite child, the child you raised to adulthood. We will never turn our back on you; breathe life into our lungs so we can shout your name! God, God-of-the-Angel-Armies, come back! Smile your blessing smile: God-of-the-Angel-Armies, come back! Smile your blessing smile: That will be our salvation (Psalm 80:7-19 MSG).

[360] The Spirit of the LORD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified. (Isaiah 61: 1-3 The Negro Bible).

[361] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 2010; Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 2007; Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 1973. Drawing from my theological education rooted in Black Liberation Theology and enriched by insights from Process Theology, I characterize a liberationist theological perspective as emerging from the lived realities of marginalized communities engaged in struggles against systemic oppression and exploitation. This perspective provides practitioners with a critical framework for analyzing societal structures, dismantling systems of injustice, and advocating for profound social transformation.

[362] James Cone, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Howard Thurman, Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, Katie Cannon, Marcella Althaus-Reid, Resmaa Menakem, and more. For more detailed information, please reference the index for the PowerPoint presentation for classes.

In preparing to implement goal three of my dissertation, which involves teaching the class “Black Church, White Religion” within the framework of Black Liberation Theology, informed by insights from Process Theology and situated within the context of my multi-faith background and exploration of meta-spirituality, I cannot help but recognize and explore the notion that within the Black Church, the interconnectedness of Blackness, oppression, and the ghetto emerges as a central theme. Drawing from the foundational principles of Black Liberation Theology, which emphasize the liberation of marginalized communities from systems of oppression, this perspective recognizes Blackness not only as an embodied identity but also as a locus of resistance and cultural resilience. Within the theological lens of Process Theology, which emphasizes relationality and the dynamic nature of God’s activity in the world, the oppression faced by Black bodies is understood as a distortion of God’s vision for justice and liberation. Additionally, the ghetto, both a physical space and a symbolic manifestation of segregation and systemic inequality, serves as a focal point for theological reflection within Liberation Theology. Historically, ghettos emerged as spaces of confinement, perpetuating cycles of poverty, violence, and social dislocation. Symbolizing the spatialization of oppression, ghettos underscore the urgent need for addressing systemic injustices and advocating for the liberation of oppressed bodies. As such, the intertwining of Blackness, oppression, and the ghetto calls for a transformative praxis that addresses systemic injustices and fosters healing and reconciliation in pursuit of the realization of God’s liberating vision for all Bodies.

The initial session of the course was characterized by remarkably insightful dialogue and candid self-disclosure among participants. This emerged from a collective recognition: each individual was engaged in a personal quest for reconciliation, both with the divine and within the communal context. However, the session did not unfold as initially intended as I encountered

technical difficulties with my work computer during the test run, necessitating a shift to conducting the class on my laptop. Additionally, due to an oversight on my part, I inadvertently emailed myself the incorrect version of the presentation to my laptop. Consequently, the class had to rely on being guided by Spirit, as I had the slides but lacked the latest version containing detailed notes, questions, and breakout sessions. As we delved deeper into the texture and interconnectedness of the words Black,[363] Oppressed,[364] and Ghetto,[365] I made an impromptu decision to facilitate a breakout session. During this session, I presented the class with three thought-provoking questions.

All three of the groups in the break-out session chose to answer the question: "How are the terms 'Blackness,' 'Oppression,' and 'Ghetto' intertwined?" In answering this question, all three groups journeyed swiftly – in their own conversations – through the basic outline that I had created for this decolonization class. They started talking about colonization in various forms, but all shifted toward reconciliation by the end of their answers. Additionally, each of the group's answers were tied around three themes: separation, self-love, and unity. The groups stated that

[363] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 1970. Cone delineates Blackness as an experiential state wherein Black Bodies navigate a system entrenched in white [Empire] racism, enduring lives marked by humiliation and suffering. Blackness signifies both oppression and potential liberation within any societal context. As Black Bodies embrace their Black identity and recognize its intrinsic value, the Blackness of God becomes pivotal in understanding the Most Divine. In a society where individuals suffer due to their identification as Black, the notion of a colorless, non-oppressed God is untenable. Either God aligns with the oppressed to the extent that their plight becomes divine, or God embodies the ethos of colonialism.

[364] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 1973; Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 2010. Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 1999. For this dissertation, I define oppressed as Bodies being entangled in distorted power dynamics that prevent their full participation in the creative process resulting from systemic injustices and deficient actualizations that exploit and marginalize certain groups. Additionally, the oppressed can be seen as Bodies subjected to systemic and institutional forces of domination, including racism, sexism, poverty, and colonialism.

[365] Jones, *God in the Ghetto*, 1979; James Hal Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1989); Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 2017. For this dissertation, I will approach the concept of the "ghetto" from two distinct yet intersecting perspectives. The ghetto is a manifestation of societal structures imposed by empirical power and White Body Privilege that perpetuate as a space where Black Bodies experience constrained opportunities for flourishing due to systemic injustices. Paradoxically, the "ghetto" is simultaneously defined as a site of resistance and resilience within the context of systemic oppression where the dignity and humanity of marginalized communities are affirmed, despite the constraints imposed by societal marginalization.

Black Bodies and the Black Church have similarly been put in a framework that pushes them to denigrate each other and themselves – Self-hate. Both groups have it embedded in their psyche - their ego - to see themselves as non-normative, and not fitting the "standard" set by White Bodies. And in order to fit into the mold of "standard" or "good," set by White Bodies, that both the individuals and the Church Body, had change themselves to fit the mold that was made for them by colonialism, enslavement, white supremacy culture, and the "White Male God." This was a mold that caused Black Bodies and the Black Church to separate themselves from the community and to focus on self-prominence. This quickly brought each group to the theme of self-love. Each group realized, and some members of the group specifically named, that they had noticed that while talking about colonialism and the effects of the empirical system, that the element that was missing was the concept of self-love. It is from this continual movement into self-love, that we – humanity – can begin to unify first the Self with ourselves, with God, and with our community.

During our second week of class, we immersed our focus towards exploring the concept of the deconstruction of Black Bodies and the Black Church. Drawing inspiration from the first chapter of the book of Exodus,[366] our discussions sparked riveting conversations. To commence the class, I provided an overview of the background of the book of Exodus, highlighting its significance as a historical narrative that recounts the redemption of Black Bodies from the bondage of an oppressive empirical system, leading them towards the fulfillment of God's

[366] Now a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." Therefore, they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. The Egyptians subjected the Israelites to hard servitude and made their lives bitter with hard servitude in mortar and bricks and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them (Exodus 1: 8-14 NRSV).

promise of redemption, and the establishment of a covenantal relationship with the Divine, as initially depicted in the biblical narrative of the book of Genesis. During our discussion, we briefly explored the parallel between the way the Egyptian empire viewed and treated Black Bodies[367] within the text and the treatment of Black Bodies in present-day AmeriKa.[368]

Transitioning to the next topic in the curriculum, we explored the origins of the Black Church. In examining the distinctiveness of the Black Church within the United States, it becomes notable that no other country employs a nomenclature for its churches that is explicitly based on racial categorization. Unlike in the United States, where the Black Church constitutes a distinct, historically significant institution tied to the African American experience, countries such as Ay-ti, Cuba, and Nigeria do not have churches segregated along racial lines. Rather, within these diverse cultural contexts, individuals simply attend church without the need for racial qualifiers. This distinction underscores the particular historical and social dynamics shaping the religious landscape of the United States, where racial segregation and the legacy of slavery have profoundly influenced the development of religious institutions. Consequently, the designation of the Black Church as a unique entity within the United States reflects broader patterns of racialization and societal divisions endemic to AmeriKan history. In examining the emergence of African American Christianity, it is crucial to acknowledge its complex historical context. Historically, the introduction of Christianity to enslaved Africans was intertwined with colonialism and cultural suppression. Scholars like Albert J. Raboteau have highlighted how this adoption of a colonized Christianity often occurred under coercion, serving as a tool of

[367] Within the biblical narrative of the book of Exodus, these Black Bodies were called the Israelites.

[368] The alternative spelling "AmeriKa" specifically references the United States of America, highlighting the country's racist, fascist, and oppressive stance towards those outside the landowning white male demographic, as originally delineated by the founding fathers. This spelling serves to underscore the cultural inferiority inherent in the USA's historical and ongoing perpetuation of systemic injustice and inequality.

subjugation by the colonizers. Furthermore, this form of Christianity aimed to suppress indigenous spiritual and cultural practices among enslaved Africans, contributing to the erasure of their heritage. By contextualizing African American Christianity within the dynamics of colonialism and cultural hegemony, we gain insights into its nuanced implications. This Colonized Christianity was used as a tool for hierarchical separation and oppression, as White Bodies used and continues to use a Christianity centered around a "White Male God"[369] and "fatherskygod,"[370] to justify their domination over Black Bodies.

As our dialogue progressed, several participants anonymously shared their reflections on how the dynamics within the Black Churches they were familiar with appeared to parallel those of predominantly White churches. These observations prompted a robust conversation, particularly focusing on the experiences of Black male leaders within Black Churches. This discussion was informed by existing scholarship exploring the intersection of race, gender, and religious institutions.[371] These Black Bodies – black men – who faced immense oppression, and were the most vulnerable outside of the Church due to the oppressive empirical system which sought to ensure that these Bodies would break just as horses are broken,[372] often exhibited a tendency to impose a heavy yoke on others and ensure that these Black Bodies, women,

[369] Christena Cleveland, *God Is a Black Woman* (New York, NY: Amistad, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2023). White male God is a conceptualized version of the Most Divine which persists in validating the oppression of Black Bodies while dwelling among, identifying with, and safeguarding the power of White Bodies and cisgender men.

[370] Cleveland, *God Is a Black Woman*, 2023. The concept of "fatherskygod" references the distinctly patriarchal transcendent male god, focusing solely on the spiritual realm, not the physical realm, and offering an escape from the natural into the static peace of timelessness and freedom, detached from humanity except to dominate them. Fatherskygod is not present or engaged when Oppressed Bodies need the Most Divine's presence the most.

[371] James Hal Cone and G. S. Wilmore, *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993); Dwight N. Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005).

[372] William Lynch and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *The Willie Lynch Letter and the Making of a Slave* (Ashland, OR: Blackstone Publishing, 2021).

LGBTQIA+[373] individuals were similarly oppressed. This excogitation quickly led to further conversations by many of the women in the class as to how going back to our indigenous faith systems and including them in the ways that we practice Christianity today can help change many of the ways that the Black Church oppresses Black Bodies. The suggestion emerged during class discussions that the integration or recognition of existing indigenous faith practices within established religious contexts might instigate a shift in male-dominated power structures within certain churches. This postulated shift, it was argued, could potentially empower women by dismantling the oppressive practices of demeaning treatment and exclusion from leadership roles that they currently endure. One of the participants said, "the shift starts with us in this class as we openly discuss new ways to move forward in our faith journey." As our discussions delved profoundly into the depths of how these empowered Black Bodies resolved to use the master's tools, as these were the only tools available to them, to dismantle the master's house. For instance, Thurgood Marshall, the first African American Supreme Court Justice, embodied Lorde's concept by wielding the very tool of the law, historically used to oppress Black people. Marshall leveraged the Constitution and legal precedent to dismantle the oppressive tools of segregation, ultimately leading to the desegregation of public schools in the United States. [374] Correspondingly, Black Liberation Theology emerged to repurpose Christian scripture and tradition as a theological response to the struggles of African Americans for justice and liberation. Theologians such as James Cone and Monica Coleman utilized Christian theology to critique systemic oppression and advocate for social transformation. By reclaiming biblical narratives of liberation and justice, Black theologians empowered marginalized communities to

[373] The acronym LGBTQIA+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and the "+" represents other identities and orientations within the community. It encompasses a diverse range of sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions beyond heterosexual and cisgender norms.
[374] Thurgood Marshall, "Brown v. Board of Education." 1954.

resist oppression and work toward collective liberation. By reinterpreting traditional narratives and centering the experiences of oppressed bodies, they used the "master's tool" of religion to critique and dismantle racism within the church and society.[375] As a result of the lengthy discussion, we were unable to address all the slides that I had prepared for the week. Consequently, I needed to begin week three at a point that is approximately two-thirds into the slides originally intended for week two, by exploring the ways in which Black Bodies and the Black Church as a collective have persistently resisted colonialism, with the topic titled "The Role of the Black Church in the Decolonization Movement."

As anticipated, week three did not unfold according to the original plan. The class had to swiftly cover the remaining slides from the previous week before delving into the central theme of the week: What is meant by the Reconciliation of the Black Church? Rather, we started with the role of the Black Church, as part of the Church Universal, in the decolonization movement; the ways in which the Black Church was involved in social justice work called for in Micah 5, outside of its four walls. Micah's call, as explained during class is to:

- Center our lives on matters of justice.
- Love and practice goodness and kindness.
- To continually humbly go and come with your God.

Initially, I highlighted the significance of the Black Church's involvement in the Haitian Revolution. This movement, characterized by its inclusivity, emphasized the importance of centering the Body of the Black Church, which encompassed Black and Indigenous Bodies, around matters of justice. I presented how faith leaders within the Black Church, including

[375] Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology*, 1993; Monica A. Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way A Womanist Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008).

Christians, Muslims, Voodoo Priests and Priestesses, and practitioners of Taino Spirituality, drew inspiration from their collective faith. They utilized this communal aspect of agapē, and justice found in all of their faith systems as a catalyst to mobilize their communities, fostering unity and working together towards a revolution whose long arc was rooted in the pursuit of justice. Furthermore, I discussed how the Haitian Revolution marked a significant milestone as the first successful slave revolt in history. These "newly freed" and reconciled Black Bodies, who had achieved a sense of newfound freedom and reconciliation in Ay-ti, carried this Spirit both in their physical and metaphysical presence and in their passionate pursuit of justice and reconciliation to other regions across the globe, transcending various faith beliefs. As we transitioned to the theme of understanding reconciliation in a fresh light for the current week, we grounded ourselves in the teachings of the extra-canonical Gospel of Thomas,[376] Jesus' final prayer with his Disciples as found in the Gospel of John, and a quote from theologian Thomas C. Oden which states:

> Contemporary cultures present no tougher challenges to Christianity than did the fall of Rome, the collapse of the medieval synthesis, the breakup of the unity of Christendom in the sixteenth century, or the French Enlightenment. Christian teaching today must be pursued amid a similar collapse of modern assumptions. Modernity has more catching up to do with classic Christianity.

To transition into the concept that Black Bodies in the present day should embrace the incorporation of traditional or ancestral spiritual practices into their personal faith journeys, we delved into a crucial point in the class. The discussion beautifully intertwined the physical Body and the spiritual Body, symbolically reflecting the intermingling that can be metaphorically observed in the strands of human DNA. This highlighted the importance of recognizing the

[376] Among the earliest surviving Christian documents, the Gospel of Thomas, estimated to date from the first century AD, presents a unique perspective on Yeshua's teachings. Focusing on the path to inner knowledge and spiritual awakening accessible to all individuals regardless of background or ethnicity, it sets itself apart from other gospels by prioritizing these aspects over external rituals and historical events.

interconnectedness of our physical and spiritual selves. One of the students in class intimated that to decolonize our own Bodies in this empirical culture, we must include a new spirituality that desires to remember what made us Black Bodies. This individual mentioned how the empirical culture centered around White Male God literally used Black and Indigenous Bodies as a source of testing, and how this limited these Black Bodies causing them to have to share their culture and traditions in different ways. Another student brought this conversation to the modern day, discussing how Black Bodies are being experimented on and limited by remarking on the ways that the Prison system and even the birth control pill is a way to limit Black Bodies. Therefore, Black Bodies and the Black Church must undergo a reset, enabling us to approach our thoughts and actions with a fresh perspective. This reset calls for a deliberate emphasis on centering our lives around justice, practicing kindness intentionally, and embodying the principle of walking "humbly with your God (Micah 6:8 NRSV)." By doing so, we can pave the way for a transformative journey forward.

During this conversation, as various members of the class raised thought-provoking questions, it became essential to address the concept that humanity can only journey towards "love" and "justice" if we establish a shared understanding of these terms. Recognizing that different Bodies and cultures may interpret words differently, we spent a long time deliberating over a sensitive word – which popped up during our conversation – which resonates with all individuals and communities; the word "nigger" became the focal point of our conversation, with some class members expressing their refusal to use the word "nigger." Others talked about how the word was re-appropriated within family and close friends as a term acceptable to use. I spoke about how being bicultural, I grew up in one culture where I did not use the term, and in one culture when I intentionally used it as it was a sense of pride. I shared that after the Haitian

Revolution, the Black Bodies of that time decided that they would call each and everybody that set foot on the Island of Ay-ti – the name given by the Taíno and Arawakan people – "*nèg*." If the Black Bodies of the past were able to embark on such a transformative journey, then the Black Bodies of today, along with the Black Church, can metaphorically follow suit. This entails challenging the dominance of the colonial empirical White Male God standard, which has imposed itself as the norm for how one should live their life. Instead, we can create space for communal change and foster a collective journeying towards embracing the principles of "love" and "justice." By doing so, we can collectively work towards a more inclusive and equitable society.

During our concluding session, the class engaged in a meaningful discussion about the concept of heaven within the perspective of a decolonized Body, broaching the topic: "How do we Recognize the Reconciliatory Path of the Black Church?" This session, drawing our theological anchor inspired by the Gospel of Mary,[377] Micah, and the Gospel of Matthew as means of redefining what is meant by the concept of the reconciliation of the Black Body and of the Black Church in *agapē* love by compelling us to:

- Clothe yourself with the perfect Human (The Gospel of Mary 10:11).
- To do justice and to love kindness (Micah 6:8 MSG).
- Love God, Love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22: 37-39 NRSV)!

[377] Elaine H. Pagels, *Beyond the Gospels: An Introduction to Gnostic Christianity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 64, 81; Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2003), 21. The Gospel of Mary boasts significant historical and theological value for several reasons. Dating back to the 2nd century AD, it peeks behind the curtain of the mainstream narrative, offering a glimpse into early Christian beliefs and practices rarely seen. Unlike many traditional accounts, Mary Magdalene emerges as a prominent figure, entrusted with receiving and transmitting Jesus' teachings. This bold portrayal challenges the male-dominated narrative of early Christianity and sparks alternative perspectives on gender and leadership. Similar to the Gospel of Thomas, Mary's gospel foregrounds Jesus' teachings and sayings, illuminating a distinct perspective that emphasizes spiritual knowledge and inner transformation. Ultimately, it guides us towards realizing the Kingdom of God within ourselves, not confined to a distant future.

We further explored how Black Bodies, and the Black Church can actively work towards manifesting heaven on earth, as we went deeper into the consideration and definition of reconciliation. As we probed further into a discussion on what reconciliation meant for that class at that exact moment, we further embraced our collective identity, knowing who we are as Black Bodies and recognizing and acknowledging our pivotal role in our own reconciliation process. We start by resetting, acknowledging that we are chosen by God, and embracing our legacy and authority to live authentically as our complete Selves.

- Reconciliation is about truth-telling.
- Reconciliation is the act of restoring a relationship or bringing about a resolution to a conflict.
- Reconciliation involves acknowledging and addressing the harm that has been done.
- Reconciliation involves working towards healing and restoration.
- Reconciliation can occur on a personal level, between individuals or groups, or on a larger societal level, between communities or nations.
- It became evident that the practice of clean pain is reflected in our actions towards ourselves and our interactions with our neighbors. Furthermore, our actions towards the Most Divine were recognized as integral to our journey towards heaven. One significant path towards this destination – "heaven" – is to embody the transformative power of agapē love and become the hands and feet of Jesus. Upon reflection, and moving in clean pain, many participants in the class discerned that becoming the hands and feet of Yeshua is reflective of the practical application of Christian teachings in one's actions and behavior. By embracing this movement of love, we can journey towards the radical inclusivity exemplified by Yeshua, as concluded by the class in our insight.

To conclude the class, I took a moment for introspection and, with complete transparency, shared my personal experiences and the evolving image I have cultivated on my own theological journey. To bring the class to a close, I took a moment of personal introspection and, with full transparency, shared my own experiences and the evolving image I have cultivated on my theological journey. This sharing, I believe, served as a reminder that the path to embodying agapē love and becoming the hands and feet of Yeshua is a continuous process of personal growth and transformation. The fire in my belly? I began by expressing my desire to present God to people in a fresh and unique manner, distinct from what I had witnessed within the various conservative Christian traditions I had been associated with throughout my life. I then recounted my seminary experience, commencing from the very first day of my Certificate in Christian Ministry at NYTS, when I decided to sit next to a Body that looked totally out of place, someone who had been othered. From that initial encounter, we were drawn to each other, and our connection persisted, and our journey unfolded, from the Certificate in Christian Ministry to the doctoral crucible of NYTS' multi-faith cohort, where we, as siblings, penned our dissertations focused on the decolonization of the church. A testament to the transformative power of difference, not conformity. Throughout this transformative spiritual journey, I arrived at the realization that my initial belief as a child, that *agapē* love is the ultimate path towards justice, remains steadfast. It is a conviction that has guided me throughout my personal and theological growth, and it continues to be the foundation upon which I stand today. While embodying *agapē* love remains a cornerstone in overcoming the legacy of colonization and reaching one's ultimate destination, embracing God's truth through deep engagement with sacred texts serves as an equally crucial pillar on this transformative journey. As King Solomon reminds us, "Train up

a child in the way he should go [teaching him to seek God's wisdom and will for his abilities and talents], Even when he is old he will not depart from it (Proverbs 22:6 AMP)," laying the foundation for a lifelong pursuit of understanding God's word through faithful exegesis becomes an essential practice in embodying agapē love and navigating the complexities of colonial history.

Chapter V

MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES

The team dedicated to the "Agapē: Embracing Clean Pain and Reimagining a Reconciliatory Pathway Towards Restoration of Dehumanized Black Bodies and Continued Discourse on the Decolonization of the Black Church" dissertation comprised of six transformational leaders who have anchored themselves in social justice work, both secularly and theologically. Thus, the members of this site-team all-walk differently, and yet in community, in their own decolonizing work. Unfortunately, unforeseen circumstances led to the departure of one team member in early 2022 and my initial advisor in June 2023.

My original advisor, instrumental in fostering a mystical understanding of the decolonizing journey while remaining grounded in the movement of Jesus, ably guided me through the initial stages of my project. Following her departure, The Rev. Dr. Malachy Williams, PhD, ThD, assumed the role, providing continued insightful guidance until the project's completion. Throughout my research, implementation, and writing, both advisors and the remaining site-team which consisted of Dr. M. Yola Dautruche, Rev. Dr. Valerie Hope Holly, Rev. Shanea Leonard, Rev. James Perry, and Rev. Rafael Reyes, PhD remained steadfast in their support.

Their combined expertise ensured both my adherence to deadlines and accountability in addressing each project topic. Notably, my initial advisor encouraged the "Black Church: White Religion" course to become the central component of this project, enriching the dissertation with practical application. Through the development and implementation of the "Black Church: White Religion" class, I embarked on a personally transformative journey, deepening my understanding

of my own evolving faith and learning to offer agapē love more inclusively. This enlightenment, born from the arduous endeavor of decolonizing my Black Body and the Black Church, would not have been possible without the invaluable guidance of my esteemed site-team and advisors.

Knowledge and Appreciation of One's Own Faith Tradition

As one who continues in his journey as a multi-faith minister and as a Body deeply invested in my theological education, the primary competency I sought to develop throughout my dissertation journey was a profound interrogation of my own faith traditions. As I initially informed my coadjutors at the outset of pinpointing a particular topic to focus my dissertation on that "one can only change the Black Church from the inside out" embarking on this decolonization journey has helped me to realize that delving into the depths and breadth of my spiritual and theological anchorage was essential for the completion of my project. To actively integrate the "knowledge and appreciation of my own faith tradition" into my research and project implementation, my site-team and I devised two key strategies:

> Strategy One: Dedicate ten hours a week to meditation, prayer, and studying sacred texts focused on agapē love and loving my neighbor as myself.
>
> Strategy Two: Enrolling and participating in two courses, with author and psychotherapist Resmaa Menakem, centered on the effects of trauma on the Body (*Cultural Somatics* and *Somatic Abolitionism*).

Decolonizing My Inner Landscape

Engaging in meditation, prayer, and studying sacred texts, with a specific focus on agapē love and loving one's neighbor as oneself, significantly amplified my awareness of my nuanced spirituality, fostering a profound appreciation for my burgeoning faith tradition. In focusing on

what texts to anchor my personal study and meditation on my own faith walk, I centered my journey around the Gospel of Mark for several reasons.

First, Mark's Gospel, written to the Gentiles – those outside the norm of Jewish religious beliefs and practices – predates the other gospels. Secondly, my dissertation centers on the Gospel of Mark and its author, John Mark, as a decolonizing lens for the Black Church. This is because his African heritage, enshrined in the Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox traditions, presents marginalized and oppressed Black individuals with a compelling narrative of spiritual and intellectual equality within the global Christian community.[378] Additionally, it serves as a primary source for Matthew, Luke, and likely John, who incorporate as much as ninety percent of Mark's narrative into their content. Mark's unique narrative style offers glimpses into his understanding of Yeshua's life through weaving elements of oral tradition, miracle stories, and other narratives to explicate his understanding of Yeshua's life. In Mark's portrayal of the life of Yeshua of Yehoshua, Yeshua emerges as an enigmatic figure who deliberately obscures his true identity, even silencing demons who threaten to reveal it. Furthermore, Mark emphasizes the limitations of Yeshua's miraculous abilities - as miracle workers both "good" and "bad" are a dime a dozen in the ancient world - showcasing instances where he is unable or unwilling to perform miracles because of their unbelief.[379] Most notably in Mark's narrative, Yeshua is often

[378] Thomas C. Oden, *The African Memory of Mark: Reassessing Early Church Tradition* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011).

[379] They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Can you see anything?" And the man looked up and said, "I can see people, but they look like trees, walking." Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again, and he looked intently, and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Then he sent him away to his home, saying, "Do not even go into the village (Mark 8: 22-26 NRSV);" Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor (respect) except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household." And He could not do a miracle there at all [because of their unbelief] except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. He wondered at their unbelief (Mark 6: 4-6a AMP).

depicted as taking his disciples into secluded spaces to provide more nuanced teachings after publicly preaching.

So, it was in studying Mark's gospel that I discerned that the call for discipleship is not the same as the call to be a member of a "Church." Being a disciple was much more of a commitment. I found in my research that "Disciples" are not only seen in the Yeshua movement, but are found outside of this movement as well. In Islam, the companions of Prophet Muhammad, the Sahabah, are revered for their close association with the Prophet and their commitment to the early Muslim community, parallel to the disciples' role in Christianity Played a crucial role in spreading and preserving the teachings of Islam.[380] In Judaism, as found in the Hebrew Bible, there are instances of disciples or followers of prophets.[381] For example, Elijah had Elisha as his disciple,[382] and Moses had Joshua as his disciple.[383] While not directly comparable to the disciples of Jesus, the concept of a master-teacher relationship is present in these narratives. My study of the Gospel of Mark during the implementation of my dissertation project has helped me to realize that not everyone is called to be a disciple.

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[380] Muhammad is the Messenger of God. Those with him are stern against the disbelievers, yet compassionate amongst themselves. You see them kneeling, prostrating, seeking blessings from God and approval. Their marks are on their faces from the effects of prostration. Such is their description in the Torah, and their description in the Gospel: like a plant that sprouts, becomes strong, grows thick, and rests on its stem, impressing the farmers. Through them He enrages the disbelievers. God has promised those among them who believe and do good deeds forgiveness and a great reward (Surah Al-Fath 29).

[381] So the Lord said to Moses, "Gather for me seventy of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tent of meeting and have them take their place there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take some of the spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people along with you so that you will not bear it all by yourself (Numbers 11:16-17 NRSV).

[382] Elijah went straight out and found Elisha son of Shaphat in a field where there were twelve pairs of yoked oxen at work plowing; Elisha was in charge of the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak over him. Then he left and followed Elijah, becoming his right-hand man (1 Kings 19:19–21 MSG).

[383] Blue Letter Bible, "H8334 - Šārat̲ - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (KJV)," Blue Letter Bible, 2024, https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h8334/kjv/wlc/0-1/. And Hashem spoke unto Moshe face to face, as an ish speaketh unto his re'a. And he returned into the machaneh; but his *mesharet* Yehoshua ben Nun, a na'ar, departed not out of the Ohel (Exodus 33:11 OJT). Here the text referencing Moses and Joshua tells the reader that Joshua is partaking "of ministerial service" to Moses.

My observation that not everyone is called to be a disciple stems from analyzing the ministry of Yeshua in the Gospel of Mark. To better grasp its contemporary relevance, understanding its historical context is crucial. Written around 70 CE, following the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, the Gospel of Mark is deeply influenced by its historical context, shaping its narrative and potential interpretations.[384] Mark's engagement with the diverse social milieu of the first-century Roman Empire, particularly in the context of Roman occupation in Palestine, underscores his sensitivity to issues of oppression and marginalization within society.[385] Moreover, the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple constituted a significant event for early followers of Yeshua, prompting questions regarding his teachings and the future of Judaism. Mark's Gospel reflects these anxieties while offering hope through the message of Yeshua's life and resurrection.

Consequently, Mark portrays Yeshua as a champion of the marginalized and oppressed, emphasizing his compassion for the poor, sick, and outcast.[386] Additionally, Mark highlights Yeshua's' acts of healing, inclusion, and solidarity with those on the fringes of society. These portrayals may reflect Mark's own experiences, beliefs, and the needs of his audience, which likely included marginalized and oppressed followers of Jesus facing persecution in Rome.[387] Thus, in its portrayal of discipleship, Mark's Gospel does not designate all who listen to Yeshua's teachings as disciples; rather, it identifies only a select few who have chosen to

[384] Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2005); James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

[385] Morna Dorothy Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005); Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, 1992.

[386] Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels* (Westmont, IL: APOLLOS, 2018).

[387] Morna D. Hooker, *Gospel According to St. Mark* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2001).

embrace the yoke of discipleship, prioritizing the work of sharing the Kingdom of God in their lives.[388]

In exploring the characteristics and behaviors of those called to be disciples by Yeshua, the Gospel of Mark, particularly, illuminates various aspects of discipleship and the distinct ways in which disciples exhibit their commitment to following Yeshua, and scholarly research offers insights into how individuals demonstrate their discipleship. Firstly, discipleship is about the way in which people's whole lives are reshaped through the impact of Yeshua and his teaching. Thus, discipleship involves a deep commitment to Yeshua as the authoritative figure and embodiment of God's kin-dom on earth.[389] Additionally, discipleship entails a transformative journey, a radical reorientation of priorities and values, marked by continuous learning and growth in faith. Disciples actively engage in the process of spiritual formation, striving to embody the values and virtues exemplified by Yeshua.[390] Through the narrative of the Gospel of Mark, Yeshua emphasizes that disciples must commit to a radical internal transformation allowing his disciples to actively serve humanity in their demonstration of agapē love.[391] When set-backs come, as is always the case in life, the ongoing nature of discipleship must be one of perseverance, forgiveness, repentance, and growth.[392]

Another key call to discipleship occurs during the call for these members of the ekklēsia to fulfill the Great Commission. In Mark's Gospel, Yeshua instructs the disciples to "Go into the world. Go everywhere and announce the Message of God's good news to one and all (Mark

[388] Richard T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009); Mark 8:34-35 NRSV.

[389] France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 2009; Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, 1992.

[390] France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 2009; Nicholas Thomas Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2023).

[391] Mark 8:34-38 NRSV, 10:42-45 NRSV.

[392] Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels*, 2018; Mark 14:66-72 NRSV.

16:15 MSG)." This is a call to share their faith and actively participate in God's mission cultivating an ever-flowing stream of justice and to loving kindness while walking humbly with your God (Amos 5:24 NRSV, Micah 6:8 NRSV).[393] Beyond mere proclamation, full participation in discipleship through the Great Commission involves embodying the Gospel,[394] as an ongoing journey.[395] Afterall, the Great Commission is not a one-time event, but an ongoing commitment to participate in God's mission throughout one's life.

In Yeshua's ministry, teachings unfold both before large crowds and in intimate settings with his closest disciples. This distinction provides insights into the call to discipleship, suggesting not everyone receives an identical call. When speaking to the crowds, Yeshua frequently uses parables like the Sower and the seed, initially accessible to crowds. The inclusivity cultivated by Yeshua here emphasizes the open-ended nature of Yeshua's initial message to crowds, attracting those receptive to his teachings but not demanding immediate and specific discipleship commitments. Yet, these stories often require further explanation for deeper understanding (Mark 4:10-20). This suggests Yeshua presents initial invitations to faith and discipleship to the general public but expects further commitment for deeper understanding. In speaking to the Disciples after speaking to the crowds, Yeshua privately clarifies parables and deeper meanings to his disciples, demonstrating a need for closer relationship and commitment to grasp certain aspects of his message. Yeshua's message to disciples focuses on establishing a distinct community marked by specific ethical demands and commitment to Yeshua's mission,

[393] Gerd Theissen, *Social Reality and the Early Christians: Theology, Ethics, and the World of the New Testament* (Minneapolis, MN: T & T Clark, 1993)

[394] Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels*, 2018. Living out Yeshua's teachings in daily life through love, service, and justice becomes inseparable from sharing the Gospel message.

[395] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2005).

signifying a deeper level of following compared to broader public encounters.[396] So in his words to those whom he spoke with regularly, Yeshua was demonstrating that not everyone is being called in the same way. The parable of the Sower highlights different responses to Yeshua's message, suggesting not everyone embraces the call to be a disciple in the same manner.[397] Moreover, the challenges faced by the Disciples imply that not everyone chooses or endures the hardships associated with full discipleship. While everyone is invited to respond to Yeshua's message, true discipleship involves a transformative commitment and active participation in his mission, which not everyone chooses or fulfills.[398]

When Yeshua puts out the call to preach the good news of the Kin-dom, this call takes place post-resurrection.[399] This means that it was not the crowd that he preached to throughout his ministry that was present for this specific commission, but a small ekklēsia out of the large body. I have come to the understanding that a disciple, one who is learning to follow the example that Yeshua left for us, and then to embody that knowledge and live like Yeshua lived with the intent of offering that Body's own imitation of Yeshua as model for others to follow (1 Corinthian 11:1 NRSV). This insight has given me a broader perspective on what it means for me to be a believer, and in understanding that everybody has different levels of practice and belief systems to anchor their faith. Learning this itself was a form of my own faith decolonization.

Complementing my introspective practices of meditation and prayer through the lens of the Gospels, I also had a reading regimen focused on deepening my understanding of *agapē* love

[396] E. P. Sanders and Margaret Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (Ann Arbor, MI: SCM Press, 1996); Ed Parish Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Ann Arbor, MI: SCM Press, 1987).

[397] John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018).

[398] Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, 1992.

[399] Mark 16:15-18 NRSV, Matthew 28:16-20 NRSV, Luke 24:46-49 NRSV.

and love for my neighbor by delving into the works of renowned theologians, scholars, and activists. The addition of these academic texts provided invaluable insights that further enriched my scriptural interpretation and challenged my preconceived notions of faith. In texts such as Howard Thurman's "Jesus and the Disinherited" and "Temptations of Jesus" I encountered poignant perspectives on Jesus' radical message of self-love and liberation. These works prompted a critical examination of the ways in which the Black Body and the Black Church have been complicit in the marginalization and oppression of other Bodies. Similarly, James' "The Black Jacobins" and Cone's "God of the Oppressed" and "A Black Theology of Liberation" sparked crucial soliloquies and meditations about the intersection of race, faith, and power, urging me to reconsider how my own theological framework could actively systems of injustice and oppression, especially from within.

Walter Brueggemann's "The Prophetic Imagination" and John Spong's "Why Christianity Must Change or Die" offered bold critiques of traditional theological frameworks, compelling me to reimagine the possibilities of a faith rooted in radical inclusivity and compassion for all member of the human Body. Then as I went deeper into even more liberal academic reading on Yeshua's embodiment and demonstration of how agapē love works as found in Bishop Pearson's words of love in action: "The loving parent we imagine God to be could not view His children as diseased with a terminal illness called sin and not apply a healing salve to all of them" exemplifies Yeshua's bold assertion that nobody is beyond the reach of God's grace, for "the operative idea that there is a right and wrong theology, or, a right God and a wrong God, is an invalid premise. All versions of God are the same thing: a human

interpretation of the Universal Consciousness."[400] Additionally, Rob Bell's "Love Wins" further challenged me to embrace a more expansive love that transcends societal limitations and prejudices, by presenting to me a sense of agapē love anew:

> God is love, and love *is* a relationship. God extends an invitation to us, and we are free to do with it as we please. As we experience this love, there is a temptation at times to become hostile to our earlier understandings, feeling embarrassed that we were so "simple" or "naive," or "brainwashed" or whatever terms arise when we haven't come to terms with our own story. These past understandings aren't to be denied or dismissed; they're to be embraced. Those experiences belong. Love demands that they belong. That's where we were at that point in our life and God met us there. Those moments were necessary for us to arrive here, at this place at this time, as we are. Love frees us to embrace all of our history, the history in which all things are being made new.[401]

Reading this portion of Bell's text caused a deep introspection and eventually a deep shift in my own theological perspectives, and even my own disgusts at the theological narratives that shaped my life within the Church. The acceptance of the human aspect of the hurt that I received within the Church Body could not be dismissed. Thus, I must make sure in my zeal for the decolonization of the resilient and wise Black Body[402] and the Black Church, that I must journey in a way in which I focus on inclusive love, for it is only this full inclusivity that will lead to reconciliation.

This curated collection of books, each meticulously chosen and devoured, played a pivotal role in reshaping my understanding of scripture, faith, and Self. These multifarious chosen texts not only challenged me to think critically and embrace discomfort but also inspired the cultivation of a more radically inclusive love for myself, my neighbor, and the stranger. My

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[400] Carlton Pearson, *The Gospel of Inclusion: Reaching Beyond Religious Fundamentalism to the True Love of God and Self* (New York, NY: Atria Books, 2009); Carlton Pearson, *God Is Not a Christian, Nor a Jew, Muslim, Hindu: God Dwells with Us, in Us, Around Us, as Us* (New York, NY: Atria Books, 2010).

[401] Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (New York, NY: HarperLuxe, 2013).

[402] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 2017.

immersion in these diverse perspectives became a catalyst for my personal decolonization and a cornerstone of my journey towards becoming a more embodied Disciple of Yeshua. As life would have it, during this transformative period, I faced various challenges, including the profound impact of a death in the family, a distressing incident of two members of my family being kidnapped, terminal illnesses affecting loved ones, significant shifts in my family finances, additions to the family, and other personal upheavals. Yet, these challenges, though onerous, became integral components of my personal journey towards reconciliation, contributing to the depth and resilience of my evolving faith.

From Agapē Love to Somatic Abolitionism

My journey towards decolonizing my faith and becoming a more embodied Disciple extended beyond personal reading and introspection. Embarking on Strategy Two, unable to enroll in two courses with Somatic Abolitionist Resmaa Menakem, both focused on the profound effects of trauma on the Body, I enrolled in one class and two training sessions with Menakem centered around his Somatic writings "My Grandmother's Hands" and "Monster's in Love." This immersive experience, as inquest into the intricacies of Cultural Somatics and Somatic Abolitionism, offered a profoundly different lens through which to discern the intersection of my faith and my Black Body, and unveiled the complex interplay between "faith" and the Body on a broader scale. These insights have significantly enriched my understanding of myself, my community, and my relationship with spirituality and theology.

Menakem's teachings shed light on the intricate dance between trauma and faith. By understanding how trauma imprints on the body and mind, I gained a more nuanced and

compassionate perspective on how historical and personal traumas might have shaped my own faith traditions and practices – as there is a considerable interplay between trauma, faith, and the embodied experience. This newfound awareness allowed me to embark on a deeper journey of self-understanding and fostered a renewed sense of empathy for myself and my community. The training specifically addressed the potent intersection of racialized trauma and faith. In our faith traditions, legacies of historical and ongoing racial trauma are often deeply ingrained. Recognizing the impact of this trauma became instrumental in addressing issues of power, identity, and justice within myself and within my community. Moreover, Menakem's teachings opened my eyes to the enduring echoes of ancestral wounds and trauma in contemporary experiences. By examining how these wounds have shaped my lineage, I gained a deeper appreciation ever transforming my appreciation for the spiritual gifts and challenges I have inherited. This ancestral connection provided a sense of grounding and wisdom, enriching my spiritual journey in profound ways. Through this lens, I began to envision a more liberatory and inclusive practice of faith, rooted in healing and collective liberation.

A central tenet of Menakem's work is the focus on the Body's role in holding and processing trauma. This focus resonated deeply with my desire to cultivate a more embodied spirituality. By incorporating mindfulness, somatic prayer, and ritual movement into my practice, I have begun to connect with my faith at a visceral level, transcending mere intellectual understanding. This embodied approach has fostered a more holistic and integrated experience of faith, one that encompasses my mind, body, and soul. Enrolling in these trainings was not merely an academic exercise; it served as a potent catalyst for personal growth and transformation within my faith tradition. The knowledge gained equipped me with the tools to navigate my spiritual journey with heightened awareness, allowing me to further navigate the complex

interplay between trauma, the body, and my beliefs. By recognizing the ways in which colonial dynamics have influenced my faith traditions, I was empowered to reclaim agency, re-imagine, and create decolonized spiritual practices for myself, while being open to how other Bodies journeyed in their own decolonization movements without judgment. Knowing that my practices, rooted in my own cultural and ancestral wisdom, offer a more authentic and empowering way to connect with my faith – and other Black Bodies are in turn doing the same in their own personal journey towards faith seeking understanding – allowing everybody to come to understand and to see the God of their faith.[403] Recognizing how colonial dynamics may have influenced my faith traditions empowers me to reclaim agency and create decolonized spiritual practices rooted in my cultural and ancestral wisdom. This understanding has led to a commitment to building collective liberation within my faith community, aligning social justice work with spiritual values. My immersion in Resmaa Menakem's training went beyond intellectual exploration. It opened a pathway to a deeper, more profound understanding of my own faith and its potential to heal and transform. This enriching experience continues to guide me as I strive to become a more embodied Body putting on the perfect human (The Gospel of Mary 10:11), dedicated to both personal growth and collective liberation.

[403] Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 2014.

Chapter VI

THE LONG JOURNEY TOWARDS RECONCILIATION

This dissertation, titled "Agapē: Embracing Clean Pain and Reimagining a Reconciliatory Pathway Towards Restoration of Dehumanized Black Bodies and Continued Discourse on the Decolonization of the Black Church," navigates the profound link between God's agapē love ethic and the long-standing decolonial work within Black Bodies and the Black Church. This lineage stretches back to the dawn of pre-literate societies, where faith traditions, rich with narratives of liberation and reconciliation with the Divine, were passed down orally. Among these narratives pulsates the ancient Mesopotamian epic, Enuma Elish, pulsating with a profound and complex theme of liberation for the oppressed relevant to the Black Body. While the narrative primarily focuses on the divine conflict between Apsu and Tiamat, the primordial deities, and the subsequent rise of Marduk as the supreme god, it also offers glimpses into the liberation of lesser beings caught in the crosshairs of this cosmic struggle. Notably, the act of creation itself, where humans are fashioned from Tiamat's blood, carries immense symbolic weight. Tiamat, embodying chaos and rebellion against the established order, is not simply vanquished but woven into the very fabric of existence. This subverts the typical victor's narrative, where the vanquished are obliterated. Instead, Tiamat's essence becomes the foundation for a new order, whispering words of reconciliation and integration even amidst profound conflict – a powerful glimpse into the human yearning for liberation.[404]

Similarly, the Gospel of Thomas, a fragmented yet Theo-poetic tapestry of sayings attributed to Yeshua, unveils alternative paths to liberation for the oppressed. Yeshua's teachings

[404] Jean Bottéro, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods*, trans. Zainab Bahrani and Marc Van De Mieroop (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1992); Andrew R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* (New York, NY: Penguin Publishing Group, 2003).

bypass earthly structures and rituals, offering a radical path to salvation. Yeshua further emphasizes self-knowledge as the key to freedom, declaring, "If you know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will realize that you are sons of the living Father (Gospel of Thomas Saying 3)." This approach to liberation empowers individuals to break free from the shackles of restrictive religious dictates and claim their spiritual destiny, rooted in personal transformative knowledge gained through lived experience. These ancient echoes, whispering across millennia, resonate deeply with the Black Body's and the Black Church's pursuit of decolonization and liberation. They serve as testament to the enduring human thirst for wholeness and reconciliation, offering powerful precedents for the decolonial journey embarked upon within this dissertation.[405]

Within the Abrahamic religious traditions, themes of liberation for Black Bodies are woven into the fabric of the narrative from the genesis of creation onward. The opening lines of Genesis[406] describe a formless void, and in this primordial state, the Spirit of the Prophetic Imagination, symbolized as Sophia,[407] breathes essential life into all existence. This divine breath pulsates with the recurring theme of liberation for the oppressed, a motif that becomes explicit in

[405] Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York, NY: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2004).

[406] In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters (Genesis 1:2 NRSV).

[407] Caitlin Matthews, *Sophia: Goddess of Wisdom Bride of God* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books Theosophical Pub. House, 2001), 4; Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of this World for Crucifixion and Empire* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2008), 203; Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2018). The Holy Spirit - Sophia - embodying the radiant and unfading Wisdom, permeating all creation as the very breath of God's power, functions as the movement Divine *agapē*, and actively engages in the liberation of the oppressed (Isaiah 61:1-3 NRSV; 1 Corinthians 12:8-11 NRSV). Serving as the advocate for humanity before the Most Divine God, Sophia operates through individuals who emulate Yeshua's treatment of his *ekklésia*, sparking a prophetic imagination within Black Bodies. This divine influence whispers liberation to the oppressed, compelling us to deconstruct and dismantle oppressive norms, guiding us towards wholeness, and fostering a future where justice and reconciliation prevail, not only in our relationships with one another but also in our connection with the Most Divine God (Galatians 3:28).

the Exodus narrative. The narrative unfolds with the Israelites, an apt symbol of Black Bodies, languishing in brutal bondage beneath Pharaoh's oppression. Their complaints[408] requesting justice reach Yahweh,[409] who selects Moses – a Hebrew raised in Pharaoh's court – as the instrument of liberation, showcasing Yahweh's power to free the oppressed. However, liberation extends beyond mere physical escape; in the wilderness, the Israelites receive the Ten Commandments, forming a covenant with Yahweh, their liberator. This covenant marks a profound transformation from enslaved Bodies to chosen Bodies, bound by shared laws and responsibilities toward one another (Exodus 1:8-14 NRSV, Exodus 3:7-10 NRSV, Exodus 19-20 NRSV). While fraught with doubt and rebellion, this narrative resonates not only with the Israelites' historical plight but also encapsulates the universal human yearning for freedom from all forms of oppression. The Exodus narrative transcends its historical context to become a potent metaphor for the enduring struggle for social justice and liberation against the weight of injustice that afflicts all who suffer.[410]

Analogously, Luke's Gospel, often referred to as the "Gospel of Mercy," distinctly emphasizes the liberation of the marginalized and oppressed. Right from the outset, Yeshua's mission resonates with the prophetic words of Isaiah, proclaiming forgiveness to the captives and declaring the kingdom of God as an imminent reality for all.[411] This recurring theme intricately

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[408] Harvey Cox, *How to Read the Bible* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2015).

[409] Lewis Bayles Paton, "The Origin of Yahweh-Worship in Israel: II," *The Biblical World* 28, no. 2 (1906): 113-127, accessed February 13, 2021, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3141019. The worship of Yahweh was introduced into Israel as a new name given by God through Moses to express a new conception of his character. The most characteristic expression for this is the new personal designation of the God of Israel, the pure Hebrew name, Yahweh. As a faithful practicing Israelite, Jesus would have served יְהוָה.

[410] Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008); Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: An Introduction* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008); Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 1989.

[411] The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me (the Messiah) because He has anointed Me to preach the good news to the poor, He has sent Me to announce release (pardon, forgiveness) to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind. To set free those who are oppressed (downtrodden, bruised, crushed by tragedy), to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord [the day when salvation and the favor of God abound greatly] (Luke 4:18-19 AMP).

weaves through the narrative, manifesting in parables, pronouncements, and transformative acts of healing and reconciliation. Notably, these expressions stand in stark contrast to societal norms, challenging hierarchical assumptions, and prioritizing the downtrodden over the privileged. The Gospel highlights God's preferential concern for Black Bodies, exemplifying a commitment to justice and inclusivity. Additionally, Luke's portrayal of Yeshua actively engaging with the marginalized - whether through healing lepers, befriending prostitutes, or dining with tax collectors - subverts societal expectations and underscores solidarity with those deemed "unworthy" by the religious and social elite. Yeshua's lived experience serves as a disruption to oppressive social structures, presenting an alternative vision of God's kin-dom characterized by an unwavering commitment to justice and inclusivity. Through this transformative vision, Yeshua invites all to participate in the collaborative work of building this inclusive kin-dom.

Grounded in the transformative essence of agapē love, my dissertation finds its core anchoring in the development and execution of a spiritual formation class titled "Black Church: White Religion, the Decolonization and Reconciliation of the Black Church." This course emerges from the recognition that both the Black Body and the Black Church have, in some respects, emerged from an imperialist expansionist colonial womb. As my dissertation unfolds, and its corresponding projects take shape, a central theme emerges: the reminder to Black Bodies and White Bodies alike, that they possess the agency to define "who we are" and "whose we are." In a contemporary landscape where most Bodie perceives their lineage through the lens of colonial exceptionalism,[412] it is crucial to underscore the diverse faith traditions present globally.

[412] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006). Colonial exceptionalism presents a benevolent guise for domination and exploitation. It distinguishes itself by framing colonialism as a beneficial enterprise for both colonizer and colonized, forcing its norms upon colonized societies. This framing legitimizes violence and exploitation, masking them as tools for progress and justifying them as necessary evils for the supposed "greater good."

Spanning diverse cultures and historical periods, members of the human race across faith traditions often hold the belief in the sacred concept of humanity being made in the image or likeness of God or gods.[413]

In a contemporary landscape where most bodies perceive their lineage through the lens of colonial exceptionalism, it is crucial to underscore the diverse faith traditions present globally. Across diverse cultures and historical periods, members of the human race, spanning various faith traditions, have consistently held onto the sacred idea that humanity was created in the image or likeness of a divine being or beings. This concept is explicitly stated in the Abrahamic religions, where Judaism's Torah declares that God created humans "in his image (Genesis 1:27 NRSV),"[414] establishing a profound understanding of human dignity and our connection to the Divine. Christianity, building upon this foundation, further affirms humanity's reflection of God's image of Yeshua – *imitatio Christi*.[415] In him, the divine essence takes on human form, solidifying the ontological link between humanity and God, metaphorically expressed as shared "DNA (Col. 1:15 NRSV)." While Islam does not explicitly mention humans being created in Allah's image, Islamic traditions, and interpretations emphasize humanity's unique role as Allah's vicegerent on Earth, a responsibility exemplified by "'*adam*'s"[416] designation as

[413] Stuart M. Matlins and Arthur J. Magida, *How to Be a Perfect Stranger: The Essential Religious Etiquette Handbook*, 6th ed. (Newick: Read How You Want, 2015); 1Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols Studies in Religious Symbolism*, trans. Philip Mairet (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991); Easwaran Eknath, *The Bhagavad Gita* (Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press, 2019).

[414] The predominantly masculine language used for God in the Hebrew scriptures reflects and reinforces the patriarchal society in which they were written. This association with fatherhood resonates with the Jewish cultural practice of paternal claim, where a father formally accepts his child as his own, establishing their rightful place within the community.

[415] Peterson, *The Imago Dei as Human Identity*, 2016. The call to conform to the image and emulate the actions of Yeshua aligns with the call for the Body of Christ to imitate God. In this sense, we share a likeness with God inasmuch as we resemble the human Yeshua of Yehoshua, whose person and actions are identified with those of the Divine.

[416] Blue Letter Bible, "H120 - 'Adam – Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (KJV)," Blue Letter Bible, 2020, https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H120&t=KJV. Adam is here defined as a human being be it the individual or the human species.

"khalifah (al-Baqarah 30)."

Beyond the Abrahamic traditions, the concept of humanity's inherent divinity finds expression in Hinduism, where the "atman (soul)" is understood as an inseparable part of the universal Brahman (divine consciousness). The Rig Veda describes humans as "self-manifestations" of the divine, highlighting the profound interconnectedness between the individual and the Divine. Similarly, Greek, and Roman religions, while distinct from the Abrahamic view of humanity fashioned in God's image, resonate with the concept of divinely sculpted mortals and divinely descended demigods, suggesting a lineage or infusion of the divine within select individuals. Thus, the search for self-understanding is a universal human quest, and for many, this journey entails navigating the complexities of dirty pain or clean pain to discover our true selves and continue our journey into our wholeness.[417]

Throughout the journey of composing this dissertation, I have come to recognize that the act of choosing is a daily commitment for me, as a member of the human Body, an endeavor applicable to everyone. Opting to traverse through clean pain, I aspire for Black Bodies to transition from the ingrained empirical beliefs shaping our lives toward a space where communal engagement is fostered. This involves returning to the paradigm of a non-colonized and reconciliatory faith system, shedding the influences of colonial education, racism, and capitalism in our understanding of faith, Yeshua, and God. The impetus for this dissertation stemmed from the movement of clean pain and guided the implementation of my three core goals: a sermon

[417] "Dirty pain" is the pain of avoidance, blame, and denial which festers and leads to cruelty, violence, dissociation, and ultimately, more pain for oneself and others. In contrast, "clean pain" is the immediate experience of pain that arises from facing difficult truths or experiences. While initially overwhelming, "clean pain" offers the potential for growth and healing. It allows us to acknowledge and understand our wounds, creating space for forgiveness, compassion, and ultimately, liberation. Both dirty and clean pain are valid and complex experiences, and the boundaries between them can be blurry. However, understanding these concepts can help us navigate our own pain and support others in their healing journeys.

series on the decolonization of the Black Church, a hip-hop and theology podcast exploring how hip-hop deconstructs the colonial system, and a spiritual formation class within a Black Church centered on the decolonization and reconciliation of the Black Body and the Black Church.

To ensure a shared understanding among class participants, of the language that the participants in the class would be using, we started our conversation attempting to come to a shared understanding of the terms “Ghetto,” “Oppression,” and “Blackness.” Next, all participating members of the Black Church, White Religion class sought to define “Black Body,” drawing from James Cone's insights, as any oppressed Body.

Next, I defined the term “Black Church” as a church or faith-based space where Black Bodies practice their faith. From that point forward, especially in the class setting, it the participants and I had more of a conversation about what reconciling the Black Body to the most divine looks like and about what reconciling the Black Church the Most Divine moves like rather than a mere teaching session. Subsequently, our engagement evolved into a dynamic conversation about reconciling the Black Body and the Black Church with the Most Divine. The shift from a traditional teaching approach to a communal dialogue was unforeseen. Initially anticipating a more instructional role, I found myself in a collaborative setting, where participants actively contributed to the conversation, delving deeper into their individual journeys of decolonization. The collective realization of the profound significance of the meaning of Black, the Black Church, and their connection to the Ghetto, oppression, and the embedded ideology of a White Male God, a White Jesus, and a fatherskygod prompted a shared commitment to unshackling ourselves from the lingering effects of colonialism on our bodies, minds, and souls.

Unexpectedly, this experience provided an opportunity to broach subjects that I had

initially deemed potentially too radical for a Spiritual Formation Class within the Church. When approaching the teaching of this class, and my role as a faith leader and pastor within the community where I conducted the Black Church: White Religion sessions, I consistently heeded the wisdom of ancestors who were church leaders and mentors who recognized my calling from childhood. Their guidance emphasized the need for caution when imparting teachings, especially to those limited to spiritual milk, to prevent leading them away from their faith – a concept rooted in Paul's writings regarding pastoral care for the congregation. Consequently, I believed that my responsibility as a "shepherd"[418] was to ensure that my teachings, preachings, and conversations with the "sheepfold" were always tailored to accommodate the theological maturity of the least spiritually mature - those who could only handle theological baby food. However, what became apparent during this class was that, although not suited for everyone, each participant who willingly engaged in the class was prepared for a substantive exploration of the deconstruction and decolonization of the self and their theology. Remarkably, they exhibited openness to experiencing God in ways that transcended conventional narratives, challenging preconceived notions about how God operates.

One notable incident occurred when I hesitated to present a video showcasing faith practices from other faith traditions. My reluctance stemmed from concerns that some participants might find the content offensive. During a subsequent discussion period, a member of my site team, who was also engaged in the class, addressed the group, shedding light on my

[418] The image of God as a shepherd and his people as sheep is a powerful and enduring metaphor found throughout various religious traditions, particularly in the Abrahamic religions. This metaphor extends to the role of church leaders, who are entrusted with the care and guidance of their congregations. The shepherd motif permeates the Old Testament, with God repeatedly portrayed as the protector and provider for his chosen people, Israel (Psalm 23 NRSV). Yeshua further develops the shepherd metaphor, identifying himself as the "good shepherd" who lays down his life for his sheep (John 10:11). He emphasizes the close relationship between the shepherd and his flock, highlighting his intimate knowledge and care for each individual sheep.

hesitancy to share the video. This team member conveyed my apprehension, explaining that I was cautious not to offend or cause stumbling among participants due to my role as a Pastor within the Church. As a shepherd, I believed my duty was to nourish, support, and safeguard the entire flock. Following this discussion and the encouragement to share the video, I presented "Rasenbleman"[419] to the class. I was amazed at how every participant identified with and recognized their faith practices within the video. By delving into a conversation about the imagery and movements in the video, designed to foster an openness to diverse perspectives and forms of spirituality, participants discovered connections to movements and faith practices either personally experienced or witnessed within their Church settings. This dialogue became a pivotal bridge, shaping the understanding of how our spiritual and physical bodies can collectively undergo a process of decolonization and reconciliation with the Most Divine.

In this reflective space, I emphasized to all participants, including myself, that the ongoing imagination towards liberation within the Black Body and the Black Church is far from novel. The journey of decolonization for both the Black Body and the Black Church is deeply rooted in a longstanding history, and our current efforts represent a continuation of this enduring movement, standing on the profound legacy of our ancestors. During this session, I underscored the historical resonance of the movement for reconciliation, highlighting how the Black Church and Black bodies have consistently pulsated with an unwavering commitment to liberation throughout history. From the thunderous bellows of freedom ringing across Haiti during the 1791 revolution to the quiet, steadfast resolve of enslaved Israelites dreaming of escape in the Exodus narrative, Black liberation has found fertile ground in the soil of faith and lived experience. The

[419] Malou Beauvoir, "Malou Beauvoir Feat. Paul Beaubrun - 'Rasenbleman' (Official Video Song)," YouTube, November 24, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RB9CEiP3VqQ.

Creation story's whisper of inherent human dignity in God's image has echoed in the fight against dehumanizing systems, while the Social Gospel movement's practical application of Christian principles fueled struggles for economic and social justice. The righteous fire of the Civil Rights Movement, ignited by the refusal to accept unjust realities, stands as a testament to the persistent march towards a world where freedom and equality are more than distant ideals. These are but a few glimpses into a vast tapestry woven with the threads of resistance, resilience, and the unwavering belief in a just future.

As we navigate the winding path towards true liberation, the whispers of these movements and the unwavering faith of Black communities serve as both compass and fuel, urging us ever onward toward a world where oppression is a phantom of the past and the shackles of injustice lie forever shattered. And that in our continuation of our reconciliation towards the Most Divine, everybody, and every Black Church must go on the journey of decolonization both communally and alone. Within the Black Church setting, many of the participants shared that because of the class, they realized that they had been involved in the self-decolonization work – by bringing some of their indigenous faith into their practice of Christianity. They also brought in some somatic practices to further ground them in their faith.

In truth, the completion of this dissertation and its associated project marked a challenging personal journey. I found myself inadvertently leaning towards exclusivity in my exploration of Christianity as I endeavored to foster inclusivity, a tendency rooted in my own ego. Recognizing the ego as an absence, a lack of self-knowledge, I grapple with its presence and the need for self-awareness. This process of introspection and deconstruction was a profound experience, requiring me to dismantle preconceived notions about myself as an educated faith leader already on a path toward decolonization. In passionately sharing my commitment to

deconstructing and decolonizing the Black Body and the Black Church, I endeavor to avoid replicating imperialistic mechanisms often associated with evangelization.

Further, I learned that the only way to advocate for decolonization and reconciliation is to take the step to decolonize harmful practices and faith beliefs from within the Self. Having tasted the transformative waters of decolonization and ventured into the crucible of the self-deconstruction of the empirical self, the Body of God,[420] like a seed sown in fertile ground, will continue to journey towards wholeness and reconciliation towards the Most Divine, individually, and communally, nourished by the wisdom of Proverbs 22:6 and the promise of an enduring covenant with the Most Divine. The most significant insight I gained during this journey of Clean Pain is the realization that reconciliation must originate from within oneself and that maintaining one's relationship with the Divine must remain central to the unfolding of everyone's journey toward reconciliation. There is an interconnectedness of inner reconciliation and a relationship with the Most Divine God. While self-reflection and introspection are crucial for personal growth, a connection with the Divine serves as the guiding force and ultimate destination on the path to wholeness. Yeshua shared with all of his followers – the whole Body of God – "Listen and take this to heart. It's not what you swallow that pollutes your life, but what you vomit up (Matthew 15: 10-11 MSG)." Thus, for me and for all, reconciliation is an ongoing journey that happens when we have both put on the complete suit of armor from God (Ephesians 6:10-18 NWT) and dressed ourselves with the perfect human. I wholeheartedly agree with Process Theologian Bruce Epperly's asseveration that:

> Following Yeshua does not mean believing outdated creeds or literal understandings of scripture or turning my back on science. I respect my childhood church. But God is so much bigger. I believe God is alive and as real as my next breath. God wants me to grow

[420] The Body of God is a term that I have coined to describe all of humanity, as all members of the human race are made in the image and likeness of God.

> and explore new ideas. Now I realize that faith is a journey and not a destination, and God is with me within all my questions and doubts. God's love includes everyone, including people who ask questions and have doubts![421]

In upholding my call to be a vicegerent, I commit to choosing clean pain through agapē love – opting for reconciliation with myself towards God. As I persist in "studying to show myself approved (2 Timothy 2:15 NRSV)" through exploring new theological concepts and ideas, it is imperative to clarify that this endeavor does not necessitate discarding the "old" or foundational theological principles that have spiritually fortified me and facilitated a closer relationship with the Most Divine God. Rather, it signifies a continual journey towards aligning and anchoring myself more closely with the agapē love ethic that drew me to God, inspires my discipleship, and compels me to fully embody the divine calling to share God's love with others. This ongoing pursuit embodies the core call on my life, allowing me to emulate both Yeshua and God more faithfully. In light of recent reflections, I find myself contemplating what lies ahead. As we continue our journey of reconciliation with God, I perceive that we have arrived at a theological crossroads, akin to reaching a new plateau. The transformative experience of clean pain prompts me to entertain a new hypothesis: rather than merely constituting the Body of God, as previously expounded in this dissertation, perhaps we embody the very Kin-dom of God. What if our commitment to justice and mercy has led us to the realization that we are indeed the Kin-dom of God? Perhaps our imperative is to persist in embodying this reality, thereby facilitating the recognition that the Kin-dom is within our grasp (Luke 17:21 NRSV; Mark 1:15 ESV). Crucially, central to Yeshua's teachings about the Kin-dom is its representation of God's continual creative presence in the world, inviting human cooperation towards flourishing. Additionally, humans participate in realizing the Kin-dom by partnering with God's creative love

[421] Epperly, *Process Theology*, 2014.

and overcoming our disconnections from the Divine.[422] This journey, then, becomes a living testament, a pathway for others to emulate, as we collectively navigate the ongoing process of growth and exploration illuminated by Divine agapē.

[422] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 2010; Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 2011; Cobb, *Transforming Christianity*, 1999.

Moral Griot

By: Lopez-Joël Dautruche

Nobody escapes being wounded for we are all are wounded people

Perhaps we're wounded physically

Emotionally, mentally

Or perhaps we're wounded spiritually

We carry genetically all of the harm that has been done to our ancestors

Yet, it is exactly the wounds that I use to reimagine life

I transform our wounds from a source of shame to a source of healing

When I was told, "Aux esclaves, tu recommanderas d'être soumis à leurs maîtres en toutes choses (Titus 2:9 BDS)"

I put on my thinking cap and remember who I am

My Moral Memory reminded me of my heritage, what I carry within, and a needed metamorphosis

My Moral Identity is a means of the self-affirmation of my unexchangeable Self

My soul has an infinite value, and I must always show my authentic self

My Moral Participation allowed me to see the already/not yet reality of freedom, love and life

My Moral Imagination assures me that the world will be a better place

And that the moral universe has a long arc that bends towards justice

What I heard is God is a Negro, a God of the enslaved, a God of the oppressed

Using what I have learned, the wounds of life, I can become a wounded healer.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Proposal

CLEAN PAIN: DECOLONIZING THE BLACK CHURCH, A RECONCILIATORY PATH
By

Lopez-Joël Dautruche, M.Div.

A DEMONSTRATION PROJECT PROPOSAL
New York Theological Seminary
2022

Challenge Statement

Birthed into the African Diaspora and theologically groomed through colonized Christianity, I am one of many who have embodied a synthetic faith. As a result of embodying a synthetic faith in the Black Church, we have been unable to live into ourselves as the image and imitation of God, as revealed in the lived life of Jesus Christ. This demonstration project will include sermons, one online class, and a podcast aimed at decolonizing Christianity within the 21st Century Black Church.

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Chapter I: Introduction to the Setting

I, Lopez-Joël Dautruche, am a *Black Body*[423] that has been seen as a representative of the *Black Church*.[424] On Sunday August 14th, 2022, I experienced a physical exhibition that caused me to realize the truth of the previous statement when a *white*[425] police officer ventured to have me profiled for driving a luxury vehicle while being Black. This Sunday the sermon was centered on Psalm 80,[426] which laments the exile of an oppressed Body of peoples. The main points that the speaker wanted to remind the Church of in choosing this text was that:

- Planted people pray to be rooted into the place of God.
- Planted people need to be rested on by God.
- Planted people pray to be restored by the One who planted them.

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[423] James Hal Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1970), 12, 63. Cone defines Black as an experience that has a person exist in a system of white [Empire] racism, a life of humiliation, and suffering. Blackness symbolizes both oppression, and liberation in any society. Because Blacks have come to know themselves as black, and because that blackness is the cause of their own love of themselves, the blackness of God is key to knowledge of God. There is no place for a colorless - non-oppressed - God in a society where human beings suffer precisely because of being identified as Black. Either God is identified with the oppressed to the point that their experience becomes God's experience or God is a God of colonialism.

[424] Henry Louis Gates, "The History and Importance of the Black Church," Harvard Gazette (Harvard Gazette, June 3, 2022), https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2021/03/the-history-and-importance-of-the-black-church/. For this thesis I will identify the Black Church - Non-Denominational, Christian and Muslim - as the cultural edifice that Black Bodies created to combat the subversive system of enslavement that sought to destroy their humanity and crush their spirit. Thus, for Black Bodies, the Black Church is a conduit of survival traced directly to the miraculous ways that our ancestors reinvented the religion of the colonizer and reclaim a means of freedom and liberation for all oppressed Bodies. The liberatory shift in Black Bodies affirmed their and likewise our identity as divine Bodies.

[425] When using the word *White*, I am referencing a theopoetic image and symbol of characteristics and experiences that emulate purity and are a series of embodied privileges justified by *synthetic ideas & beliefs. White Bodies* have access to authority and power that allows them to establish and dictate the normative criteria for all *other bodies* considered non-*White* people in society.

[426] Restore us, God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved. You transplanted a vine from Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. Its branches reached as far as the Sea, its shoots as far as the River. Why have you broken down its walls so that all who pass by pick its grapes? Boars from the forest ravage it, and insects from the fields feed on it. Return to us, God Almighty! Look down from heaven and see! Watch over this vine, the root your right hand has planted, the son you have raised up for yourself. Your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire; at your rebuke your people perish. Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself. Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name. Restore us, Lord God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved (Psalm 80: 7-19 NIV).

Shortly after leaving Church, I noticed that a police car was following my vehicle very closely. After about five minutes of following directly behind me, a Caucasian police officer pulled me over. Already aware of the rules, I immediately lowered the front windows, and put my hands on the steering wheel, so that he could see that I was in no way a threat. The Caucasian officer walked up to the car on the passenger side, and fiercely knocked with his nightstick on my daughter's window, which I had not yet opened. I instantly rolled down her window to reveal a sleeping six-year-old. His reaction was one of astonishment. Next, he came to the front window and looked at me. He saw a Body who did not dress for himself that day. This attire that I wore seemed to be something suitable, centered on a Caucasian police officer's pragmatic view of what a Black Body coming from a Black Church should look like. I wore a T-shirt, a pair of chinos, and a cross dangling from my neck; the choice of my clothes was not of my own volition. I put on my chinos because I just didn't want to be so informal in church that Sunday. I chose a salmon-colored t-shirt because my partner had told me that she likes the color combination of salmon and blue on my skin tone; the shirt read "Be Human" referencing Psalm 139.[427] Although I rarely wear jewelry, for reasons unknown to me, on that day I decided to wear my cross. I had kept the cross hidden under my shirt because I had put it on just for me; no one else needed to know that I was wearing it. However, a theological word which changes everything - before leaving church to have brunch with my pastor and friends, my daughter pulled the cross out of my shirt saying that everyone needed to see my pretty cross. I listened to her.

As the Caucasian police officer looked me up and down, I spoke: "May I please ask what you're stopping me for?" He responded that he was not allowed to answer me until I had first

[427] I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well (Psalm 139:14 NRSV).

given him my license and registration. I complied; and he then basically told me that he was just making sure that everything was legitimate with the car. Next, he proceeded to ask me, ``What was I, a stranger, doing in his neighborhood? Why did I go to church so far from my home when clearly the license I am looking at says you live over 30 miles away?" I heeded to his authority, answered all his questions, and gave him what he demanded. He then told me that he stopped me because he could not clearly see my license plate's expiration date and he walked back to his car with my information in hand. The Caucasian police officer kept me and my sleeping daughter waiting for about 30 minutes. When he finally returned, the Caucasian police officer told me that everything was validated but now I needed to prove the car was insured. Even though his computer showed that the car was indeed insured, there seemed to be an asterisk that stated "read side-note." When I presented him the insurance papers, he took another 15 minutes to substantiate them. When he reappeared once again, the Caucasian police officer told me that I was now acceptable and he allowed me and my child to leave but I was to remember that "there is nothing that I could change that would stop me from getting pulled over by the police again in that vehicle." I spoke to him with respect and told him to be safe; I had passed the empirical test, and shooed off as long as I embodied this empirical imagination, but it was a mere figment of who I truly am.

History

As experienced in my need to be acceptable to the Amerikan[428] colonial gaze, the world is steeped upon the foundation of colonialism. Within the Amerikas and the Caribbean, the Black

[428] Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, "Amerika Definition & Meaning," Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster, 2019), https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Amerika. I have used this alternative spelling referencing specifically the United States of America as an intent to portray the country's racist, fascist, and oppressive stance which the country holds for those other than the landowning white man, as originally proposed by the founding fathers showing how culturally inferior the USA truly is.

Church roots continue from the indigenous practices that were carried into the Amerikas through the memory and Bodies of the enslaved. Analogously, the Black Church was also birthed out of an *imperialist expansionist colonial womb*. As those who are called out to be followers of God in the Amerikas, the Black Church, be it led by a male, a female, or a person who is gender non-conforming was never trained to be astute in biblical scholarship; they were trained in the in biblical scholarship of the Puritan White male theological thought - *synthetic faith*.[429] Accordingly, believers were, and still are, taught more about the way of Whiteness than the way of Jesus. Ironically, while much of the Bible and Qur'an were conceived as a means of resisting empire, religious texts have been used by colonial powers to undergird their imperial designs. There from, the experience of the Black Church and Black Bodies legacy of colonial heritage exist a sizable range of areas where the Black Church needs to be decolonized. Through its movement out of the birth canal of colonialism, the Black Church has been stolen from the original setting of the earliest members of the *ekklēsia* - The Body of God.[430]

As one birthed into the Black Church and theologically groomed to be an Afro-Caribbean-American Minister of *agapē* love, I have felt and pondered on the weight of the colonized Black Church since my youth. I deliberated and scrutinized how others and I experience as one disassociated and othered within the *Ekklēsia,* in the embodiment of the Black Body, causing a disconnection from our divine wholeness due to colonialism.[431] I have been

[429] It is important that I here add that all faith is synthetic as our faith is made up synchronously of our context, culture, and the happenings of our lives. That's why we need the apathetic and cataphatic movement of theology (what is not faith and what is faith; what is culturally normative and not culturally normative).

[430] Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, "Amerika Definition & Meaning," Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster, 2019), https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Amerika. I have used this alternative spelling referencing specifically the United States of America as an intent to portray the country's racist, fascist, and oppressive stance which the country holds for those other than the landowning white man, as originally proposed by the founding fathers showing how culturally inferior the USA truly is.

[431] Erin Blakemore, "Colonialism Facts and Information," National Geographic: Culture (National Geographic, May 3, 2021), https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/colonialism. Colonialism is defined as control by one controlling entity over a dependent area or people. An example of colonialism can be found when

having the conversation about the colonization of the Church for many years, I always thought it of great significance to consider how a decolonized *Black Church*[432] may engage and *commune* with its community by *returning* to the example of the non-colonized[433] and reconciliatory faith system, by shedding the aspects of colonial *education, racism,* and *capitalism* in how we understand Yeshua of Yehoshua: Christ and sacred texts.[434]

Personal

As I read the Holy Bible, in particular the descriptions of how Yeshua of Yehoshua's lived his life, I can clearly see the stature and predicament of the Black Church today; one gorged and satiated in colonialism.[435] One field in which the Black Church can be similar to

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one sovereign nation subjugates another, extending their borders into both contiguous and noncontiguous areas while conquering and exploiting the subjugated population to increase their own power justifying their conquests by asserting their legal and religious obligation to take over the land and culture of the "Black" indigenous Bodies.

[432] Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E.* (London, UK: SCM Press, 1979); Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood, eds., *Controversies in Body Theology* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2008), 159-160. Israel - a community of oppressed multi-ethnic Bodies - was first subjugated, indoctrinated, and exploited by Egypt nearly forty-six hundred years ago to expropriate the building of the pyramids. Another example can be observed starting approximately in the third century BC, is during the period when Jews were governed by Rome through House Codes - a rule that delineated what Oppressed Bodies looked like, where they lived, their theological beliefs, and their overall value, their local economy, and usage of women and slaves. A third example can be found nearly five-hundred years ago when the French conquered the indigenous people of Ay-ti. After being bound into chattel slavery, Black Bodies began to revolt out of a Spirit of liberation, which subsequently gave rise to the Haitian Revolution: a united effort of Black Bodies - a community - decolonizing themselves. The final example is found in AmeriKa, a people which has and continues to use religion to manipulate as well as suppress the Oppressed from identifying and revealing their personal divine Body by keeping their theological imagination in the same box that the proleptically Puritan Christians built.

[433] In all actuality, historically, we have never had an example of non-colonized faith because the introduction of religious faith is always built on colonization. However, we do have an example in the lived life of Yeshua, of the attempt to decolonize faith and theology, emBodied in a theology of the underside which contains only the hope of decolonization. Yeshua experienced and shared the example living into an image and imitation of decolonization, in his incessant discord with those who uphold the Royal Theological Imagination.

[434] Joan E Taylor, *What Did Jesus Look Like?* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2018); Leonard J Swidler, *Yeshua : A Model for Moderns* (Kansas City, Mo.: Sheed & Ward, 1993); James W. Fleming, *The Jewish Background of Jesus*, (LaGrange, GA: Biblical Resources, 2004), 11. It is essential to understand that the historical Palestinian Jewish Yeshua of Yehoshua (Jesus Christ) was an Afro-Asiatic man described by the ancient historian Herodotus as resembling, the Egyptians, and the Ethiopians having a broad nose, thick lips, woolly hair, and burnt of skin. Likewise, it is impossible for Yeshua to be understood outside of the sense of community which reveals him as a poor - Gentile because some of the ways in which he did not keep to Jewish customs - Jewish member of a minority group in the midst of a larger dominant and controlling group of the Greco-Roman world, and son of a *tekton* (a stonemason by trade).

[435] Taylor, *What Did Jesus Look Like*.

Yeshua of Yehoshua, is in their embodiment of the statutes of scripture which emphasize communal human relationships. When living out a life of ritual and moral holiness, Yeshua followed the command to "love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18b NRSV)," and went on to give a new commandment that identify a believer as a member of The Body of God: "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. (John 13:34b NRSV)," leading to freedom in the midst of colonialism. The Black Church of today, has moved away from both the visual and auditory experiences molded into the original *Ekklēsia* by the adept and extemporizing hands of the master potter Yeshua of Yehoshua. For whenever the vessel of the *Ekklēsia* was marred in the potters hand, Yeshua was able to add water and rework and remold the *Ekklēsia* towards following him in *agapē*[436] love by living into the *imago Dei* and *imitatio Dei* (Philippians 2:3-8, Joshua 18: 1-12 NRSV).[437] Today, many of those who are members of the Body of God have been unable to fully live into themselves as the *imago Dei* and *imitatio Dei* and the *imago Christi* and *imitatio Christi*.[438] Ergo, those members felt themselves to be expurgated members of the

[436] Mark Dimmock and Andrew Fisher, "Fletcher's Situation Ethics." In *Ethics for A-Level*, 1st ed., 79–90. Open Book Publishers, 2017. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1wc7r6j.9; Elaine Padilla, *Divine Enjoyment: A Theology of Passion and Exuberance* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2014), 45, 48, 51. There is no other absolute law other than the law of *agapē*, as all other laws are guidelines laid to achieve this greatest measure of love. *Agapē* is a charitable love that moves circularly by ascending and descending freely and generously in superabundance. The movement of *agapē* seeks to catch sight of the divine beauty, and ultimately attain the eternal good of the divine element in the soul by wounding the soul of the Body of God with love and kindness.

[437] PBS. "Glossary Definition: Imago Dei ('Image of God')." PBS. Public Broadcasting Service, 2022. https://www.pbs.org/faithandreason/theogloss/imago-body.html. Inspired by Latin Theologians, the term *imago Dei* refers most fundamentally to two things: first, God's own self-actualization through humankind; and second, God's care for humankind. To say that humans are in the image of God is to recognize the special qualities of human nature which allow God to be made manifest in humans. In other words, for humans to have the conscious recognition of their being in the image of God means that they are the creature through whom God's plans and purposes can be made known and actualized; humans, in this way, can be seen as co-creators with God.

[438] Ryan S. Peterson, *The Imago Dei as Human Identity: A Theological Interpretation* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2016), 1. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=6488556. Created from dtl on 2022-04-28 16:09:43. The call to be in the image and imitation of Yeshua, is similar to that which calls the Body of God to imitate God. We are like God in the sense that we are like the human Yeshua of Yehoshua, whose person and actions are identified with the person and actions of God. Jesus Christ, being fully divine and fully human, is God's image in the world, revealing the identity and character of God. Rather than bringing a new intention into existence, Yeshua brings to fruition God's permanent intention for humanity and establishes the conditions for others to join him in the fulfillment of their human identity.

Body of God because of the lack of *agapē* love found amongst the Church due to the lack of our ability to live into the love as Yeshua commanded. These disassociated bodies have either been forced to or inspired by Spirit to separate from the Church because of its colonial beliefs and practices that perpetuate violence against Black Bodies or called to bring about an incontrovertible shift within the Black Church. It is a shift akin to Yeshua's challenging the Body of God of his time to integrate *agapē* love into the human community.

Yeshua - as a dissociated member of the Hebraic community due to His strong beliefs in liberating Black Bodies in a fascist law-abiding system of control - started an act of "Sankofa:" going back to retrieve something from His relative past to create a relatively better future. This dissociation with a law-abiding community is a first century act of decolonizing faith, religion, and God. As members in the Body of God who are made in the image and imitation of the Divine, we are a paradigm for all of humanity to follow as Yeshua pointed out in his prescriptatory words: "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Ancestor (John 14:12 NRSV)."[439] "The Mother's/Father's king-om is within you and it is outside you. When you know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will understand that you are children of the living Father/Mother (Gospel of Thomas 1:2-3)." The Body of God is called to move and work ministerially as one whole body: a community. For the purposes of assessing what is and who is the Black Church. Firstly, this thesis project will use the profile of the Black Body as an integral part of the research and development of a method of decolonizing the spiritual and social

[439] Bible Hub, "Strong's Greek: 3962. Πατήρ (patér) -- A father, 2022, https://biblehub.com/greek/3962.htm. The word used for Heavenly Father, Πατέρα (patér), can also be translated as ancestor and elder.

practices of the Black Church. In undertaking the study of a disadvantaged, dislocated, disenfranchised, and dehumanized Body of people: the Black Church, this project aims to identify the parts of the collective Black Body in Amerika that have been compromised by colonialism. Secondly, this thesis project will aim to identify the theological and the social belief systems that govern Black Bodies is a crucial area to analyze when decolonizing the Black Church. Finally, this thesis project will aim to identify the capacity for change, which is reliant upon the Black Church as a collective body realizing the foundations were built upon racist puritan Christian views that support the exploitation of Human Bodies. Focused on the decolonization of "human relationships" within the Black Church, the singular focus of this thesis will be on how the Body of God can impregnate and cultivate neighborly relationships based on *agapē*: a belief that no one wants or chooses to be alienated.

In ascertaining the identity and social belief systems of the Black Church, a systematic approach of investigation that empowers my site team, all project participants, and I to engage in *non-exploitative communication* that facilitates and bolsters harmonious relationships within the Black Church will be employed. This project aims to anatomize effective solutions to the issues of colonialism that Black Bodies confront every day in the theological and social context of the Black Church by using continuous cycles of investigation designed to reveal effective solutions to the seen and unseen complexities of proliferated colonialism and colonization experienced by the Body of God within the Black Church.[440] I will be evaluating the changes within myself, my research group, and that of all participants during the course of this thesis project, especially as it relates to the understanding and practice of leadership in the life of the Body of God. I will attempt to evaluate the project's collective process by observing a shift or series of shifts in the

[440] Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research* Fourth ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2014), 1, 23, 26-27.

demonstration of *agapē* love as members of the Body of God, a more divine embodiment of the image and imitation of the Most Divine. The image of God can be experienced through the image and imitation of Yeshua (*imitatio Christus)*. Embodying the image and imitation of Yeshua calls us to "clothe ourselves with the perfect Human, acquire it for ourselves as they commanded us, and proclaim the good news (The Gospel of Mary 10:11)."

It is first pertinent to define the bailiwick of the Black Church. The transliterated word Church is both a symbolic and a prosaic word. The word Church, although changed throughout the centuries, is an ancient morpheme. Before "the Church," there was the use of the word *Ekklēsia,* referring to a community of Bodies governed by God. This first-generation Yeshua of Yehoshua movement or community of believers, correspondingly was the *Ekklēsia* of Israel in the First Testament. This first-century use of *Ekklēsia* within the Yeshua Movement spotlights both the theological and secular continuity of - a name for the gatherings of communities and the adoption of *Ekklēsia* as a permanent collective group identifier - the entire ethno-religious Body of God.[441] As such, our setting is the Black Church.

The Black Church

The genesis of the Black Church started when the Neo-Assyrian Empire (2 Kings 16-19; Daniel 4; Jonah 3; Isaiah 36-37) decided to conquer, enslave and exploit other people for personal benefit and a community emerged out of an act of theological imagination inspired by the Spirit of liberation.[442] The Black Church as we know it today, did not start until after over ten million African people were stolen from their homes and 388,000 of the abducted people were

[441] Ralph J. Korner, *The Origin and Meaning of Ekklēsia in the Early Jesus Movement*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2017), 1, doi: https://doi-org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/9789004344990_002.

[442] Robin Ngo, "10 Things to Know about the Assyrian Empire," Biblical Archaeology Society, May 31, 2019, https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/ancient-cultures/ancient-near-eastern-world/10-things-to-know-about-the-assyrian-empire/.

shipped through "*The Middle Passage*" and brought to the early beginnings of AmeriKa for the sole purpose of profit: a God ordained chattel slavery.[443] As these enslaved Black Bodies were stolen and thrown into a manufactured "New World," one of their first initiations amongst the indigenous bodies already present in the land was the concept of indentured servanthood already practiced by the heterochthonous Puritan colonists - the new Israel in the new Jerusalem experiencing a new heaven and a new earth.[444] Indentured servanthood was at first a means by which those who were incarcerated or fiscally challenged were given the opportunity to obtain freedom and liberation, as these *servants* paid off their debts through free physical and intellectual labor after being sold to pecunious families. During the earliest portion of Amerikan colonialism, servanthood was not predicated by the copiousness or scarcity of melanin in one's skin. Servants whether Black or White worked and lived together. Equivalently, masters Black and White owned servants. But there was a shift in the Master/Servant and Black/White dynamics in 1660, as the colonial (*racial*) imagination of White indentured servants caused them to break the covenant of servanthood. Whites realized the privilege of racism within the capitalistic foothold of the Puritan faith belief. As the White indentured servants fled from servanthood, it became extremely laborious to locate and repossess indentured White servants due to the forthcoming privilege of Whiteness - that of white supremacy creating, White Bodies, not the other way around.[445] Coincidentally, when Black indentured servants fled from the

[443] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "How Many Slaves Landed in the U.S.?," PBS (Public Broadcasting Service, September 19, 2013), https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/how-many-slaves-landed-in-the-us/. The Middle Passage represents the beginning of race-based bondage when millions of enslaved Africans were forcibly transported from their indigenous homes to the AmeriKas as slaves whom were the only remedy for the economic-dessert that plagued the embedded capitalistic systematization of those of the Royal Imagination.

[444] Dwight N. Hopkins, *Down, Up, and Over: Slave Religion and Black Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 13.

[445] Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 48.

oppression of servanthood, it was relatively effortless to capture and repossess Black servants due to the foreshadowed encumbrance of Blackness. Subsequently, the early Puritan Church capitalistic imagination caused them to claim that God had already willed and perpetuated the right for one Body to act in governance over other Bodies. Thus, in the late seventeenth century, a governance of White Bodies over Black Bodies was evoked; propagating that only dark indentured servants would be used in chattel slavery. As the enslavement of Black Bodies were a highly profitable fixture in the economy of early Amerika, the Puritans invested heavily and brutally in the process of ministering through chattel slavery (See Figure 1-2.).[446] With the White propagation that however cruel chattel slavery might be, the African slave in Amerika was happier embracing free intellectual and physical labor than enjoying a pre-colonized life. As a result of the White hunt of the Black Body, Black Bodies of Africa had to supply slaves or be slaves themselves as violence, ferocity, and the intolerable survival pressure was applied by this Puritan ministry of a God ordained servanthood.[447]

[446] Urbana Missions, "The U.S. Racial Crisis and World Evangelism: Tom Skinner Speech," YouTube, January 29, 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvKQx4ycTmA (Accessed April 28, 2019).

[447] Cyril L. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1963), 7.

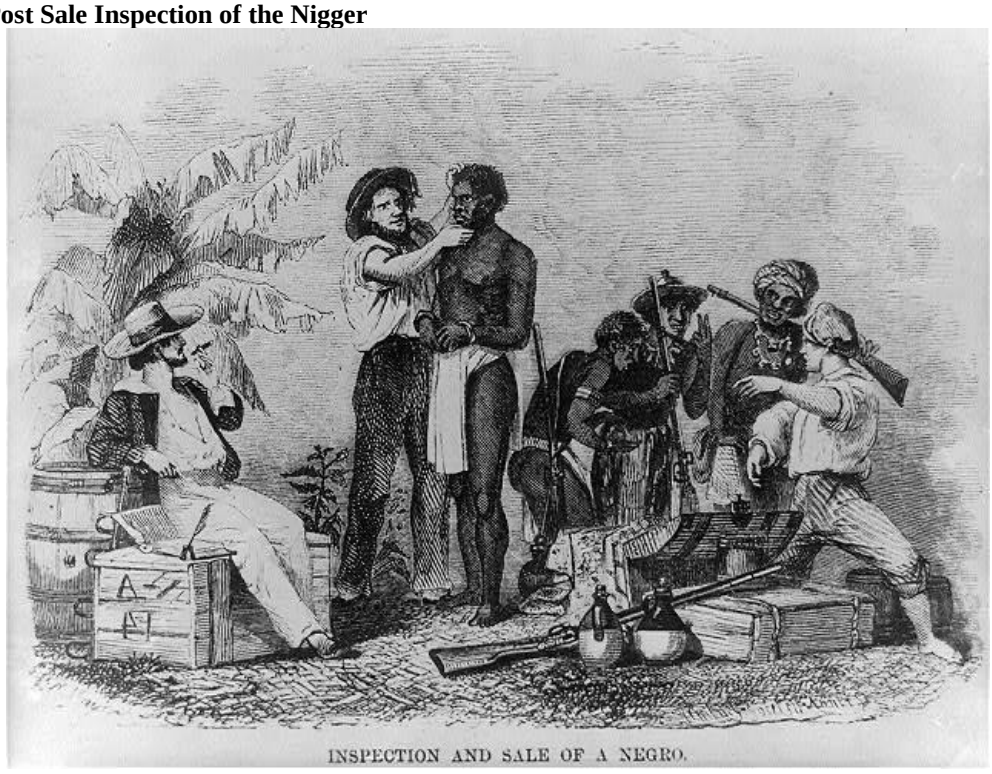
Figure 4: The Slave Trade

Figure 5: The Inspection and Sale of the Enslaved

As those forced to engender and effectuate free intellectual and physical labor - enslavement - privileged Slave Owners sought and tested for strong, imaginative, and erudite Bodies by placing these Black Bodies in dens of purification.[448] In their search for the perfect oppressed Body, slave owners (See Figure 3.):

> examined them for defects, looked at the teeth, pinched the skin, sometimes tasted the perspiration to see if the slaves' blood was pure and his health as good as his appearance. Some of the women affected a curiosity, the indulgence of which, with a horse, would have caused them to be kicked 20 yards across the deck. But the slave had to stand it. Then *in order to restore the dignity which have been lost by too intimate an examination, the purchaser spat in the face of the slave*. Having become the property of his owner, he was branded on both sides of the breast with hot iron. His duties were explained to him by an interpreter, and *a priest instructed him in the first principles of Christianity.*[449]

Figure 6: Post Sale Inspection of the Nigger



INSPECTION AND SALE OF A NEGRO.

[448] James, *The Black Jacobins*, 7; Herbert S. Klein and Ben Vinson, III. *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3, 12-15.

[449] James, *The Black Jacobins*, 7-8. emphasis added.

Figure 7: Branding of a Black Woman

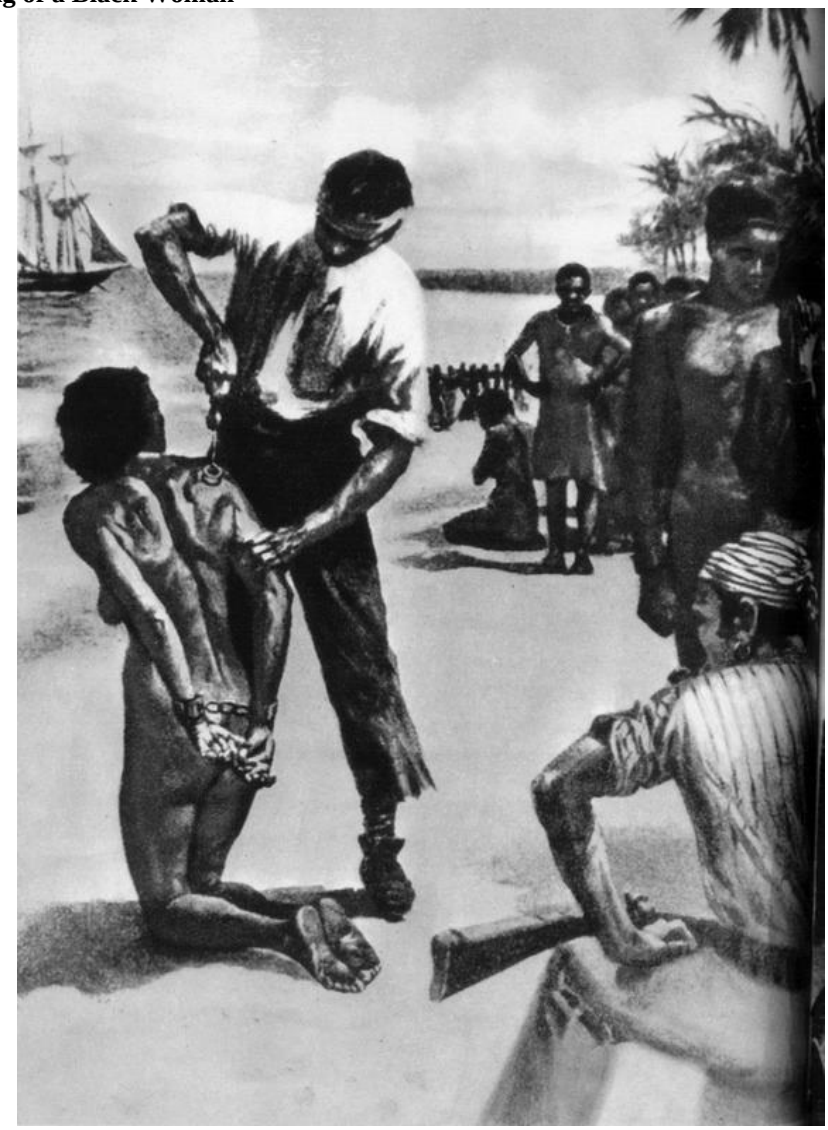
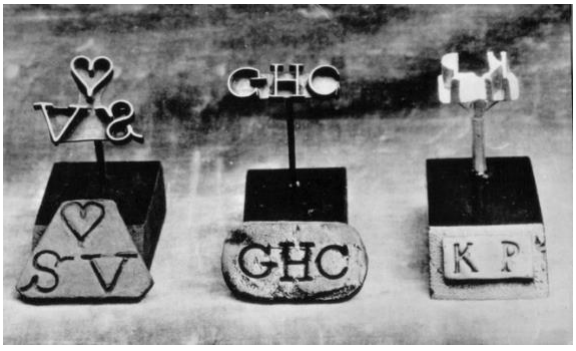


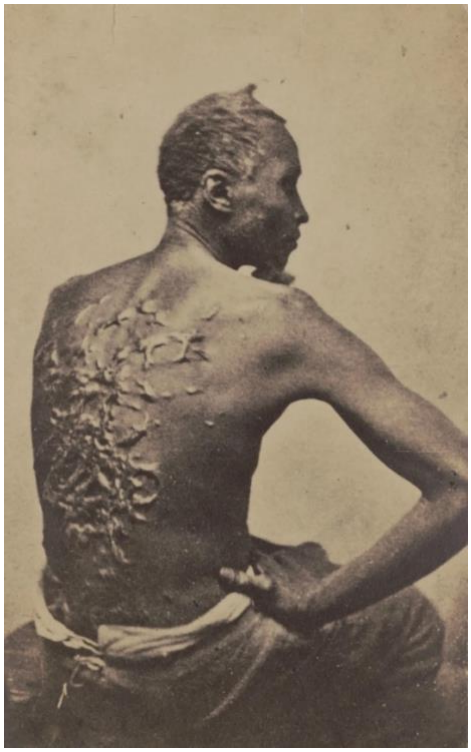
Figure 8: Metal Branding Irons with Owners' Initials



In their attempt to keep the Black Body under perpetually servitude, Whites borrowed a well-known breaking strategy to break the Blacks unceasingly (See figure 3-5.).

> I have a fool proof method of controlling your black slaves, if installed correctly, it will control the slaves for at least three hundred years.… I use fear, distrust, and envy for control purposes…. Let us make a slave. What do we need? First of all, we need a black nigger man, a pregnant nigger woman, and her baby nigger boy. Second, we will use the same basic principle that we use in breaking a horse, combined with some more sustaining factors. We reduce them from their natural state in nature; whereas nature provides them with the natural capacity to take care of their needs and the needs of their offspring, we break that natural string of independence from them and thereby create a dependency state so that we may be able to get from them useful production for our business and pleasure…. Pay little attention to the generation of original breaking but concentrate on future generations…. We must completely annihilate the mother tongue of the nigger and institute a new language… [because language] leads the heart of the people.[450]

Figure 9: Whipped Peter (Slavery's Brutality Undeniable)



[450] William Lynch, *The Willie Lynch Letter and the Making of a Slave* (Long Island City, NY: African Tree Press, 2017), 6-7, 10, 14, 25.

Upon arriving enslaved and purchased by citizens of the thirteen colonies, the process of *Christianization* of the Body took on a multipronged approach. The Black Body after being tested for their strength and prowess before purchase, was then broken through the propagandization and indoctrination of sexual humility (See figures 1-4, 7.):

Figure 10: The Invisible Man

"Breaking the Buck." Both male and female slaves were publicly dehumanized when the slave owners and their hired help raped and sodomized Black bodies daily as a means of both instilling fear and maiming the human Spirit that naturally resists: an attempt to separate the divine Body from the ancestors. Additionally, the Puritans developed and spoon-fed Blacks a theology tailored to manipulate and reform their pre-existing ethics and morals. Thus, the "Slave Bible"

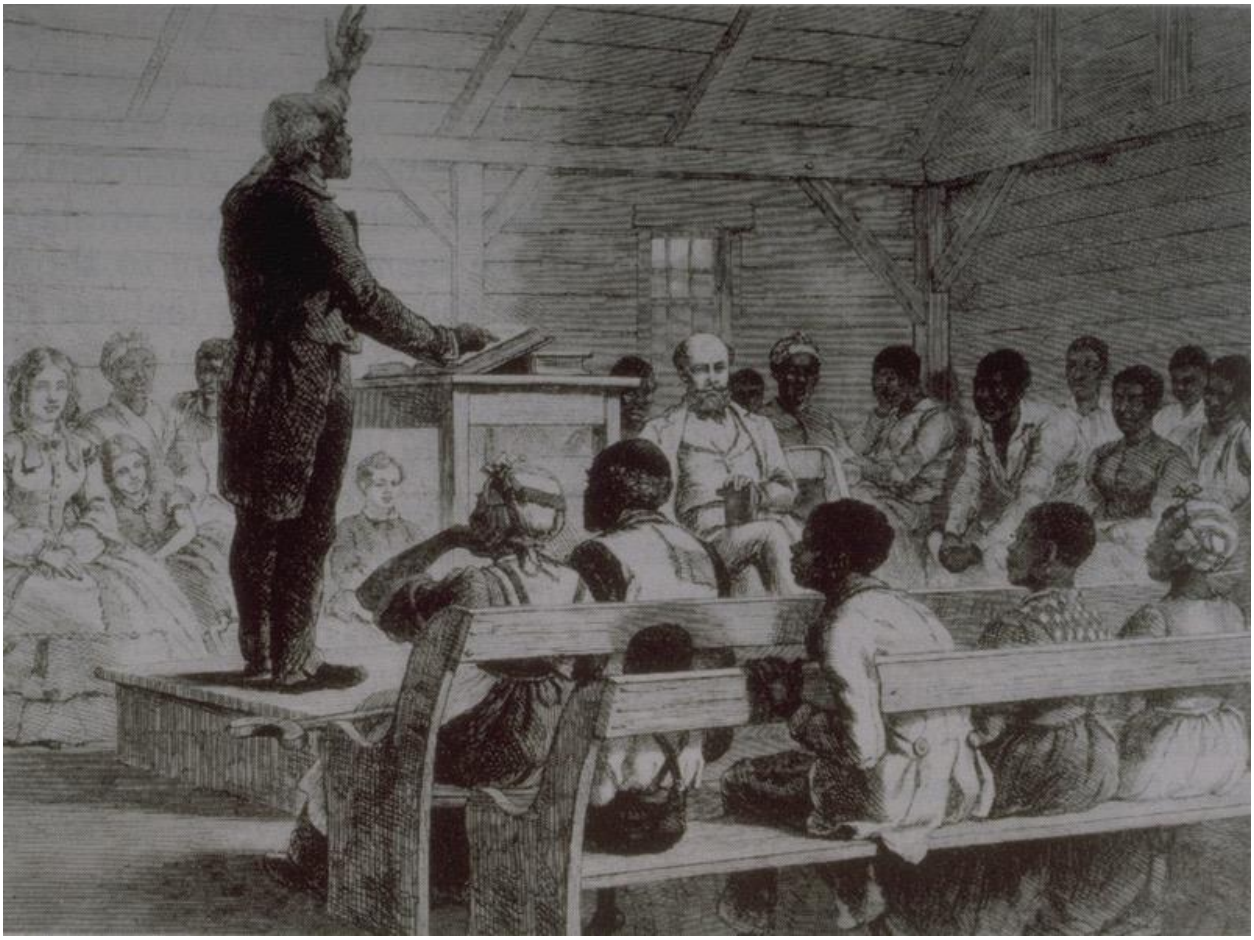
was created to indoctrinate the enslaved person by persuading them to believe that the God we come from desired and commanded the "Slave" to obey and respect these "God ordained" masters who have been chosen to lord power over those who cannot "reason"[451] for themselves by a Puritan LORD

or modern Israelite (See figure 8-9.).

Figure 11: Enslaved Baptized Upon Leaving Ship

[451] Jacqueline Stodnick and Renée Trilling, eds., *Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Studies* (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2012).

Figure 12: Master Overseeing Black Church Service



As the enslavement of Black Bodies was not designed to be a temporary solution to a capitalistic enigma, it was crucial to *breed* the next generation of free laboring slaves as a less defiant and imaginative slave; one who was solely concerned with increasing their productivity by the self-exploitation of their own Body for the master.[452]

Consequently, the elemental religious belief and imperialist thought patterns of the slave master infiltrated the Black community during slavery. Notwithstanding, even with a lack of access to most portions of the King James Version of the Bible that was thought to promote

[452] Eric Eustace Williams, Capitalism & Slavery (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

freedom and liberation, descendants of the enslaved were able to tap into their theological imagination - as we can only believe what we can imagine[453] - and actively catechize and resuscitate the retained faith in the divine within themselves which overcame the oppression found in the Slave Bible. Thus, enabling the procurement of a reconnection with the spiritual connection of liberation found within their inner *Self*.[454] Despite living in an oppressed and dehumanized divine Black Body only presented with a cruel despotic white male God, the Enslaved Bodies imagination evoked an ever-evolving religious tradition which demonstrates:[455]

- A liberative God who wrestled with the oppressive socioeconomic and political systems of the White Body.
- Aesthetic and ritual dimensions of religion that were liberative in spiritual terms.
- Religious thought as liberational in theological terms.
- An *agapē* thy neighbor aspect of community.

I believe that the verse found in the Slave Bible used by the Puritan's connected the enslaved to the divine within - the *imago Dei*, *imago Yeshua* and *imago Sophia*:[456]

> The Spirit of the LORD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to *them that are bound*; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified (Isaiah 61:1-3 The Negro Bible).

[453] Michel Martin, "Slave Bible from the 1800s Omitted Key Passages That Could Incite Rebellion," NPR (NPR, December 9, 2018), https://www.npr.org/2018/12/09/674995075/slave-bible-from-the-1800s-omitted-key-passages-that-could-incite-rebellion; Christena Cleveland, *God Is a Black Woman* (New York, NY: Harperone, 2022). About 90 percent of the Old Testament is missing [and] 50 percent of the New Testament is missing.

[454] C. Michael Smith, Jung and Shamanism in Dialogue: Retrieving the Soul, Retrieving the Sacred (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2007), 120. According to analytical psychologist Carl Jung, the Self signifies the unification and centralization of consciousness and unconsciousness in a person.

[455] Anthony B. Pinn, Terror and Triumph: The Nature of Black Religion (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 82-83.

[456] The imitation of Sophia parallels the aforementioned imitation of God and imitation of Yeshua.

In embodying The Holy Spirit, the enslaved Black Bodies moved like the divine feminine always working for the benefit of others[457] regardless of the large number of redactions and edits to the biblical texts reflecting a White male symbol of power chosen by God. The embodiment of Sophia is a manifestation exhibiting that the Spirit cannot be enslaved by one's intentional plan to withhold liberative information from Black Bodies. Further, the embodiment of Sophia gave Black Bodies the wisdom needed to deconstruct their given racist Puritan Theology leading us to the scales of injustice falling from our eyes by which we receive liberative sight forthwith (See figure 10).

This was demonstrated at the first landing site of the enslaved in Ay'ti (Haiti), as the Spanish and French colonizers enslaved indigenous Bodies in the image of the third-century theologian Saint Thomas Aquinas who believed that "men of outstanding intelligence naturally take command, while those who are less intelligent but of more robust physique, seem intended by nature to act as servants."[458] Despite proselytization endured by the Enslaved Body - these broken and battered Bodies who despite divisions in language and history share a common culture and destiny - became aware of themselves as a people with divinely given right of total

[457] Cleveland, "She Who is Worth Seeking as All Costs," in *God Is a Black Woman*, pp. 1-21.

[458] Roberta Anderson and Dominic Aidan Bellenger, *Medieval Worlds: A Sourcebook* (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2013) 275.

Figure 13: Black Women Leading Church Service

liberation from oppression (See figure 14.).[459] This God given breath of liberation - *sankofa* - caused the enslaved to feel a consanguinity with the ancestors who had, contrary to the lies spread pertinaciously about Negro docility, started to seek a way back to the holistic self by:[460]

- Revolting at the ports of embarkation.
- Holding hunger strikes on board the ships.
- Undoing their chains in attempts at insurrection.
- Committing mass suicide by throwing themselves overboard, and infanticide.

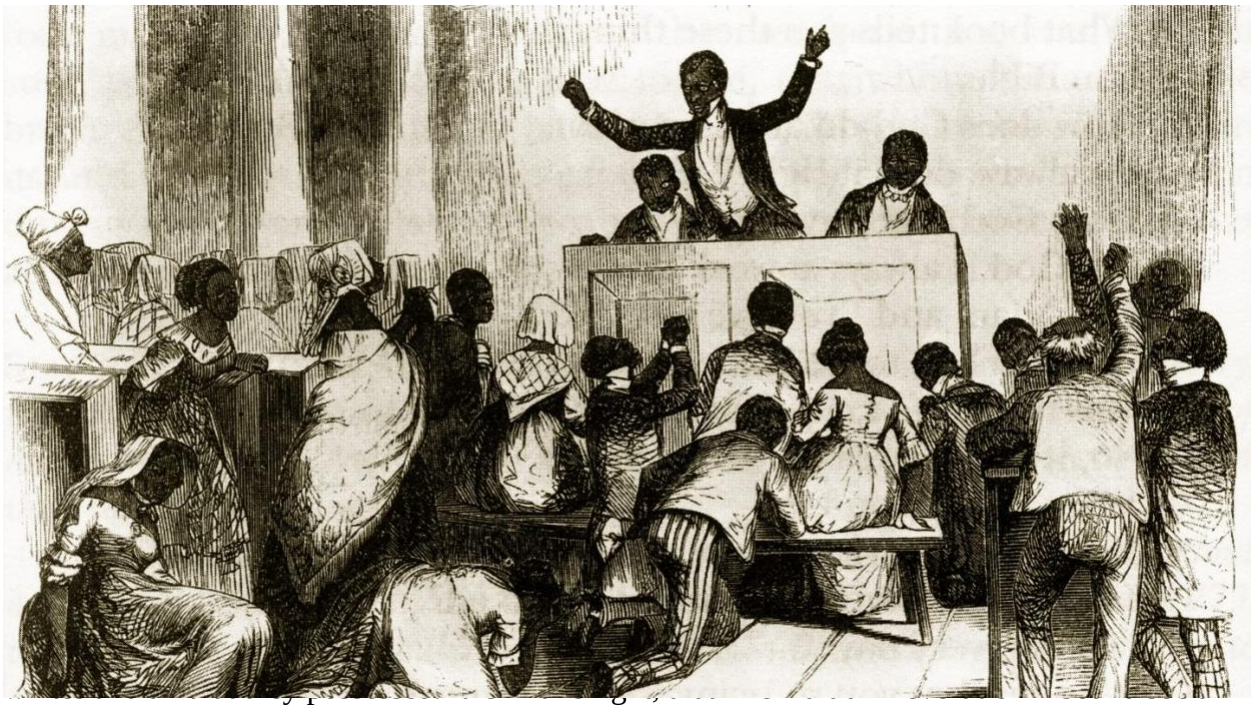
[459] Kelly Brown Douglas, Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), 15; Joshua Ian Jelly-Schapiro, "The Caribbean in the World: Imaginative Geographies in the Independence Age" Dissertation. University of California, Berkeley, 2011.

[460] Dianne M. Hancke, Guide to the Names of God (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2014), 52; Jean-Bertrand Aristide, "Umoya Wamagama: The Spirit of the Words" (Thesis, 2006); James, The Black Jacobins, 8-9. Ruach Elohim the breath of God.

- Poisoning themselves, masters, and landowners.
- Having Negro midwives perform simple operations on newly born children causing these infants to suffer from jaw-sickness and causing the death of nearly one-third of the children born on the plantation.

Furthermore, during their religious services in their shadow life behind master's back (See Figure 11.),

Figure 14: The Start of the Black Church in AmeriKa



and economic insurrection – completely changed the course of world history and the relations between all humanity by playing an inordinately important role in the renewed articulation of human rights and social justice - a form of liberation theology that moves from an imageless imagination to the embodiment of a mobile imagination that is radically and abundantly

[461] Hymns served as a way for the enslaved Black Bodies to express the community's re-imagined decolonized faith, the community's sorrows, while at the same time buoying their hopes. You can find samples of some corn ditties in the appendix.

changed.[462] The mobile imagination developed and ameliorated during the Haitian Revolution affected the governing and violence towards Black Bodies throughout creation helping the oppressed Bodies in Amerika to open their own theological imagination using the heavily redacted Slave Bible along with the spiritual element of connection found in prayer. Dutty Boukman a leader of the Neg Maron, a practicing Muslim, and an houngan (Vodou Priest) prayed a prayer, in an interfaith meeting, known to be one of the catalysts of the Haitian Revolution:

> The god[463] who created the earth, who created the sun that gives us light. The god who holds up the ocean, who makes the thunder roar. Our god who has ears to hear. You who are hidden in the clouds, who watch us from where you are. You see all that the white has made us suffer. The white man's god asks him to commit crimes. But the god within us wants to do good. Our god, who is so good, so just, He orders us to revenge our wrongs. It's He who will direct our arms and bring us the victory. It's He who will assist us. We all should throw away the image of the white men's god who is so pitiless. Listen to the voice for liberty that speaks in all our hearts.[464]

Boukman's prayer - in a multi-faith service - moved like a Drum Beat flowing through the Bodies of the enslaved connecting the oppressed with the divine within, because the Most Divine was the creator of the music which unites Divine and divine in the vibrations of the talking drum.[465] With an unscaled eye, bent towards the liberation of the Black Body, the Black community of faith, that would be known as the Black Church became a constant source of concern to the colonizers as they feared that the Black Body would rise and no longer be under servitude.

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[462] Gaston Bachelard, *Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Institute Publications, Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1988), 1-2.

[463] In my writings I have used "God" or "god" as a way of intentionally proclaiming that while a capitalized "G" similar to an all-caps LORD, is often used as a way to describe the All Mighty in the traditional Abrahamic faiths, the Most Divine has been worshiped and lifted on high since before this tradition came to be as god. This can even be found in the Torah (Old Testament) when Elohim (God) is authenticated as ancient Semitic title, "god," the chief deity of all the other gods - "the god." This is also clearly found in the Biblical reference of "Lord (Genesis 1:1 NRSV)" and "LORD (Genesis 2:4 NRSV)."

[464] Margaret Mitchell Armand, *Healing in the Homeland: Haïtian Vodou Tradition* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013), 57.

[465] Jacob K. Olupona, ed., *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society* (St. Paul, MN: International Religious Foundation, 1991), 84.

As such, it is from its genesis, that the Black Church found its political and prophetic voice in the struggle for *abolishment*. Black faith leaders took a stand against the oppressive substratum of the colonizers confronting the institution of chattel slavery. In their re-imagining the Royal Imagination into a Prophetic Imagination, the enslaved Bodies engaged in the abolitionist movement, as they sought emancipation, reconstruction, and liberation by dismantling Puritan tenets that violate living into the *imago Dei* and *imitatio Dei*.[466] In practicing their faith, Blacks, as whole members of the Body of God, continue to work as the instrument that will unite the city of God with God. This is due to the *tzelem* (Genesis 1:27 OJB)[467] - God is inside me, inside you, and inside everybody else. Humanity comes into the world with God, we only have to search for it inside of ourselves for complete *gnosis*.

> 'One does not see with the soul or the spirit, but the mind which is between the two sees the vision... We should clothe ourselves with the perfect Human, acquire it for ourselves as he commanded us, and proclaim the good news, not laying down any other rule or other law beyond what the Savior said (Gospel of Mary 10:11-13).[468]

Thus, the Black Church moves closer into *gnosis*, towards the decolonization of Black Church in re-imagining the master's tools, by stepping into its prophetic imagination, fully aware that in order to dismantle the system of oppression new tools must be developed - namely the embodiment of *agapē* love.

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[466] Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, as Christ loved us[a] and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Ephesians 5:1-2 NRSV).

[467] Bible Hub, "Genesis 1:27 Hebrew." Genesis 1:27 So God created man in His own image, September 2022. https://biblehub.com/genesis/1-27.htm#lexicon. To be the *tzelem* of the supreme God is the for humanity - the Body of God - to be a representative figure characterizing and emanating the likeness of God.

[468] Hal Taussig and John Dominic Crossan, A New New Testament: A Bible for the Twenty-first Century, Combining Traditional and Newly Discovered Texts (Boston, MA: Mariner Books /Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), 226. The term tzelem refers to humanity being made in the image and imitation of "אֱלֹהִים" Elohim.

Figure 15: Reappropriating the Puritan Religion.

Chapter II: Preliminary Analysis of The Challenge

Living in the time and culture of the experience age,[469] humanity must move from a computer-like form of binary thinking: zeros and ones, black and white, the puritan God and the Black God. Rather, humanity is called to move towards multiplicity and expansiveness: a centralization in the ethic of *agapē* love as demonstrated by Yeshua (Jesus of Nazarene), a revelation of God on earth made clear in fully human form. My definition of *agapē* love can be found in the parable of the befitting yoke. As I have reimagined, and will be using throughout this thesis, *agapē* is a type of embodied love that is present in the essence of creation. It is the birthing sound[470] of which love is the essence of life. A phenomenon love that when in pain, it brings you healing. A phenomenon love that transcends our linear and binary understanding of time; a circular phenomenon of experiencing past, present, and future all at once to create Self liberation. It is a love that uplifts the human experience in an attempt to bring it into wholeness. I do not believe that humans, and therefore God and theology, can be seen in a binary way, for the liberation of the Body can never be binary. As I cannot fully express this multiplicity of spiritual inclusiveness - moving from the binary - solely in pros, I will be writing from a theopoetic purview in an attempt to express a renewed and re-imagined non-binary theology - liberation theology.[471] Much of my theopoetic assertions within the thesis will be anchored in the

[469] Sharon Bennett, "The Experience Age Has Arrived," Business Analyst Articles, Webinars, Templates, Jobs (Macgregor Communications, February 21, 2019), https://www.batimes.com/articles/the-experience-age-has-arrived/. The modern era in which humanity's locus is a connected camera televising our life in the moment has increased, but where a digital profile (for example, a Facebook profile and passive feedback) is no longer the center of the social universe. Now at the forefront of the social universe, individuals experience continual self-expression (creating an experience) where the dominant feedback is attention.

[470] There are certain elemental sounds that are present in all human languages, and when played on an instrument like the piano are all in the same key. An example of this can be found in the way a baby or child calls their parents: Mama or Papa.

[471] Lilian Calles Barger, The World Come of Age: An Intellectual History of Liberation Theology (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 13-14; Liberation theologies are a social and political movement within the "church" where the Most Divine's dwelling has shifted through the connection to the global struggle for

liberationist movements of scholars in the niche of Liberation Theologies, Process Thought, and Reframed Theologies (the Mystics).

Liberation Theology Thinkers

- James Hal Cone: the founder of Black Liberation Theology, challenged the dominant white theological paradigm and launched a radical spiritual conversation with his book Black Theology and Black Power. Cone strives - in a Puritan white-dominated[472] christofascist society, in which Black Bodies[473] are knowingly and unknowingly defined as evil and sinful to make the Gospel[474] relevant to the life and struggles of Blacks and to help Black Bodies learn to love themselves by stepping into the divinity within the human Body. Cone reaffirms and asserts continually in subsequent books that God is always fighting for the oppressed, and any contradictory message that is not related to the liberation of the poor in society is not Jesus' message.[475]
    - God's revelation means liberation — nothing more, nothing less.
    - In the Bible revelation is inseparable from history and faith. The God of the Bible is a God who makes God's will and purpose known through God's participation

experiences of oppressed for freedom confronting two seemingly irreconcilable truths: the biblical promise of freedom and equality and the reality of political bondage because scripture is now interpreted through the plight of the oppressed. These theologies (Black, Ecojustice, Feminist, Latinx, LGBTQIA+, Mujerista, Native American, Queer, Womanist) are the steppingstone allowing for humanity - and for this thesis, the Black Church - to start to decolonize themselves and step into the fullness of their whole Self.

[472] Please reference the definition of "White" in Chapter 1, citation number 3.

[473] Please reference the definition of "Black" in Chapter 1, citation number 1; Resmaa Menakem, Somatic Abolitionism, Lecture presented at the Omega Institute for Holistic Studies, October 2022. When considering the meaning of the words Body and Bodies, it is important to discern and recognize that the term Bodies has nothing to do with identity, nationality, or ethnicity. Bodies literally means that we live in a structure that is predicated on pigmentality. A structure which determines who is human or who is not based on pigment. White Bodies have deemed themselves as the Supreme structure by which everything else will be judged.

[474] N. Clayton Croy, A Primer of Biblical Greek (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 116. εὐαγγελίζω, to pronounce the good message or glad tidings.

[475] James Hal Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 33, 46, 48.

in human history. The liberation of the Black community *is* God's liberation. This is so because God is revealed in Jesus as a God whose righteousness is inseparable from the weak and helpless in human society.

    - We should not conclude that the Bible is an infallible witness. God was not the author of the Bible, nor were its writers' mere secretaries. Efforts to prove verbal inspiration of the scriptures result from the failure to see the real meaning of the biblical message: human liberation! Unfortunately, emphasis on verbal infallibility leads to unimportant concerns. While churches are debating whether a whale swallowed Jonah, the state is enacting inhuman laws against the oppressed. It matters little to the oppressed who authored scripture; what is important is whether it can serve as a weapon against oppressors.

- Gustavo Gutiérrez: founder of Latinx Liberation Theology, which combines theology with social activism, calls for believers to aid the oppressed through their involvement in civic and political affairs, thereby promoting social justice.[476]
    - The denunciation of injustice implies the rejection of the use of Christianity to legitimize the established order. It likewise implies, in fact, that the Church has entered into conflict with those who yield power. And it leads to acknowledging the need for the separation of Church and state because this is of primary importance in liberating the Church from temporal ties and from the image projected by its bongs with the powerful. This separation will free the Church from compromising commitments and make it more able to speak out. It will

[476] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973).

show that in order to fulfill its mission, the Church relies more on the strength of the Lord than on the strength and power.

- If there is no friendship with them [the poor] and no sharing of the life of the poor, then there is no authentic commitment to liberation, because love exists only among equals. There are not two histories, one profane and one sacred, 'juxtaposed' or 'closely linked.' Rather there is only one human destiny - all human history is Christo-finalized.
- There is one thing That is privileged to be a paradoxical side of God, in relation to which men are able to manifest their deepest commitment: Our neighbor! The sacrament of our neighbor! The neighbor is not he whom I find in my path, but rather he in whose path I place myself, he whom I approach and actively seek.

- Walter Brueggemann: known for combining literary and sociological modes when reading the Bible, is best known for being an exegete and theologian in his movement towards naming and use of the prophetic imagination.[477]
  - The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us. The prophet engages in futuring fantasy. The prophet does not ask if the vision can be implemented, for questions of implementation are of no consequence until the vision can be imagined. The imagination must come before the implementation. Our culture is competent to implement almost anything and

[477] Walter Brueggemann, *Delivered Into Covenant Pivotal Moments in the Book of Exodus, Part Two* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 9-10; Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001); Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1986). Brueggemann is known for writing several biblical and preaching commentaries as well as developing Old Testament theological methods consisting of literary mode, social function, and dialectical approach.

to imagine almost nothing. The same royal consciousness that makes it possible to implement anything and everything is the one that shrinks imagination because imagination is a danger. It is the vocation of the prophet to keep alive the ministry of imagination, to keep on conjuring and proposing future alternatives to the single one Empire wants to urge as the only thinkable one.

- The Black Church is following Pharaoh - the Royal Imagination - as the Puritan AmeriKan Church embodies the royal imagination. Every imperial agent wants to reduce what is possible to what is available. The wonder of the Exodus narrative is that the role of Pharaoh continues to be re-performed many times and in many places. “Pharaoh” reappears in the course of history in the guise of coercive economic production. In every new performance, the character of Pharaoh makes claims to be absolute to perpetuity; the character is regularly propelled by fearful greed; the character imposes stringent economic demands on a vulnerable labor force. And characteristically, such a performance ends, exposed as false, in death. It is the insistent wisdom of the narrative, always being re-performed and reasserted, that the claim of Pharaoh is a charade; every time a powerful charade, but every time it is unsustainable (Exodus 2:23 NRSV), and we learned yet again that there is nothing absolute or perpetual about such claims by the regime.
- When serious people of good faith disagree, they’ve got to go back into the narratives and come at it again. One of the problems in the church is that people are not willing to do that. People have arrived at a place where they think they have got the answer.

Process Thinkers

- John Boswell Cobb: a prolific author who has written immeasurably on religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue is deemed as the transcendent scholar in the field of process philosophy and process theology. In his work, Cobb is known for his transdisciplinary approach, integrating perspicacity from divergent areas of study, and bringing diverse specialized disciplines into propitious communication.[478]
    - "Jesus is the only channel through which God is present in the world." On the contrary, the Wisdom we meet in Jesus is precisely the Wisdom that is already known by all. Exclusivism implicitly denies that this Wisdom is truly God, and thus opposes the Christian understanding of the incarnation, which, in turn, is the basis of christocentrism. And Jesus tells us that we can find the divine within.
    - I identified Christ with creative transformation. I understand creative transformation as God's active presence in the world rather than as exhaustive of God's reality. Hence, Christ as creative transformation, is the incarnation of God. As such, Christ is not another name for Jesus, but it is important to show how closely and richly Christ is bound up with the historical person. I interpreted Jesus' message as one that disrupted the simple continuity of the hearers with the past in such a way as to open them to God's present gift of new possibility. I understood the new not as displacing the past or discontinuous with it, but rather as creatively transforming it. I proposed that Jesus' life and death generated a field of force and that to enter that field is to be opened to creative transformation.

[478] John B. Cobb and Paul F Knitter, *Transforming Christianity and the World: A Way Beyond Absolutism and Relativism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 80, 83; John B. Cobb, *God and the World* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2000), 9.

- Suppose we Christians are impelled to include Gautama Buddha within our internal histories. Granted, the impulse comes from Jesus. Will the result be simply an expansion of the history from which we live so that the center remains Jesus? Or will Gautama introduce a new center--one that displaces Jesus from centrality? Such displacement of Jesus is not to be rejected a priori in the name of Christian faith. On the contrary, faith expresses itself in action whose consequences we cannot anticipate. If faithfulness to Jesus leads to the displacement of Jesus from centrality, then *such displacement is itself faithful*.

- Alfred North Whitehead: a mathematician and philosopher, was instrumental in pioneering the approach of metaphysics and meta-spirituality, now known as Process Philosophy and Process Theology. Whitehead thus asserted that religion is both the last refuge for human savagery and synchronously that religion is the main instrument of human progress. Thus, it is necessary that religion unceasingly metamorphose the outer life of religion through the integration of science and religion while remaining faithful to its inner life. Whitehead lists two requirements for religious leaders to unceasingly metamorphose the outer expressions of their inner experiences: First, religion is beyond: "collective enthusiasms, revivals, institutions, churches, rituals, bibles, and codes of behavior."[479] Second, in the midst of metamorphoses, it is pertinent that the religion does not see the abandonment of old and archaic ideas as another defeat of religion. Rather they must understand that another step of spiritual insight has been gained.[480]

[479] Alfred North Whitehead *Religion in the Making* (New York, NY: The MacMillan Company, 1925), 6-7.
[480] Alfred North Whitehead, *Science in the Modern World* (New York, NY: The MacMillan Company, 1925), 181, 238; Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 16, 18, 67.

- When we consider what religion is for mankind, and what science is, it is no exaggeration to say that the future course of history depends upon the decision of this generation as to the relation between them.
- Religion, therefore, while in the framing of dogmas it must admit modifications from the complete circle of our knowledge, still brings its own contribution of immediate experience.
- Religion is the vision of something which stands beyond, behind, and within, the passing flux of immediate things; something which is real, and yet waiting to be realized; something which is a remote possibility, and yet the greatest of present facts; something that gives meaning to all that passes, and yet eludes all apprehension; something whose possession is the final good, and yet is beyond all reach; something which is the ultimate ideal, and the hopeless quest.
- In considering religion, we should not be obsessed by the idea of its necessary goodness. This is a dangerous delusion.

Reframed Theology Thinkers

- Henry Corbin: a Philosopher, Theologian, Iranologist, and Scholar of Islamic Mysticism, whose spiritual path was inveigled by the writings of Suhrawardy. By walking in this path, Corbin hypothesized that the *imagination* is the primary means to engage with creation, as prayer is the creator of a renewed vision. Through his own prayers, he came to discern that all of creation is a theophany of the Divine - the finite image of the Unique

Divine. Hence, Corbin's life was devoted to freeing humanity's religious imagination from all forms of fundamentalism.[481]

- The Imagination is the scene of the encounter whereby the supersensory-divine and the sensible "descend" at one and the same "abode." Thus, it is the Active Imagination which places the invisible and the visible, the spiritual and the physical in sympathy. It is the Active Imagination that makes it possible, as our *shaikh* declares, "to love a being of the sensible world, in whom we love the manifestation of the divine Beloved; for we spiritualize this being by raising him (from sensible form) to incorruptible Image (that is, to the rank of the theophanic Image), by investing him with a beauty higher than that which was his, and clothing him in a presence such that he can neither lose it nor cast it off, so that his mysticism never ceases to be united with the Beloved.
- Prayer is the highest form, the supreme act of the Creative Imagination.... For prayer is not a request for something: it is the expression of a mode of being, a means of existing and of causing to exist…. The organ of Prayer is the heart, the psychospiritual organ, with its concentration of energy, its himma.... Prayer is a "creator" of vision.
- Between the universe that can be apprehended by pure intellectual Perception (the universe of the Cherubic Intelligences) and the universe perceptible to the senses, there is an intermediate world, the world of Idea-Images, of archetypal figures, of subtle substances, of "immaterial matter." This world is as real and objective, as

[481] Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 156; Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Ṣūfism of Ibn ʿArabī* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

> consistent and subsistent as the intelligible and sensible worlds; it is an intermediate universe "where the spiritual takes body and the body becomes spiritual," a world consisting of real matter and real extension, though by comparison to sensible, corruptible matter these are subtle and immaterial. The organ of this universe is the active Imagination; it is the place of theophanic visions, the scene on which visionary events and symbolic histories appear in their true reality. Here we shall have a good deal to say of this universe, but the word imaginary will never be used, because with its present ambiguity this word, by prejudging the reality attained or to be attained, betrays an inability to deal with this at once intermediate and intermediary world.

- John Shelby Spong: a Bishop of the Episcopal Church, endorsed for the fundamental reimagining of the Christian belief methodology away from theism and traditional doctrines towards a more expansive Christian ethic. The centerpiece for much of Spong's writing is that the popular and literal interpretations of Christian scripture are no longer sustainable as they do not adequately speak to the plight of modern-day Christian communities. He believed that theism had lost its trustworthiness as a valid realization of God's nature. Thus, a more nuanced approach to scripture, informed by scholarship and love, following the example set by Jesus Christ, who fully expressed the presence of a God of compassion and selfless love - the meaning of the *ekklēsía's* proclamation, "Jesus is Lord." This is an affirmation that Jesus was adopted by God as God's child, and this

process of adoption is the way that God was fully incarnated in Jesus Christ and can be made incarnate in us.[482]

- God is not a Christian, God is not a Jew, or a Muslim, or a Hindu, or a Buddhist. All of those are human systems which human beings have created to try to help us walk into the mystery of God. I honor my tradition, I walk through my tradition, but I don't think my tradition defines God, I think it only points me to God.
- Whatever it is that people experience in Jesus has today come to be identified with medieval doctrines based on premodern assumptions that are no longer believable. That identification means that serious theological discussion seems to accomplish little more than to erect a division between the shouters and the disinterested. Jesus becomes the captive of the hysterically religious, the chronically fearful, the insecure and even the neurotic among us, or he becomes little more than a fading memory, the symbol of an age that is no more and a nostalgic reminder of our believing past. To me neither option is worth pursuing. Yet even understanding these things, I am still attracted to this Jesus, and I will pursue him both relentlessly and passionately. I will not surrender the truth I believe I find in him either to those who seek to defend the indefensible or to those who want to be freed finally from premodern ideas that no longer make any sense.

[482] John Shelby Spong, *Why Christianity Must Change Or Die* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2009); John Shelby Spong, *Eternal Life: A New Vision Beyond Religion, Beyond Theism, Beyond Heaven and Hell* (New York, NY: Harperone, 2010); John Shelby Spong, *Jesus for the Non-Religious* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2009), 9; John Shelby Spong, *Resurrection: Myth or Reality? A Bishop's Search for the Origins of Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1995).

- The founding moment of the Christian story is not about either an empty tomb or the resuscitation of a deceased body. Its original proclamation asserted that, in some manner, God had raised Jesus into being part of who God is. Jesus was raised by God into God.

- Henri Jozef Machiel Nouwen: an ordained Catholic priest, professor, and prolific writer who studied psychology as a doctoral student to explore the human side of faith by coupling psychology and spirituality. Through that search, Nouwen could embrace his own emotional and spiritual fallibility as a conduit for perceiving his locus - the position of the Self - as God's Beloved and subsequently sharing this discovery with the Body of God. Based on his openness about his struggles with brokenness and self-doubt,[483] Nouwen constructed a template for spiritual formation that championed a creative theology of service that embraced woundedness as part of our shared human condition.[484]
    - Theological formation is the gradual and often painful discovery of God's incomprehensibility. You can be competent in many things, but you cannot be competent in God.
    - I know that I have to move from speaking about Jesus to letting him speak within me, from thinking about Jesus to letting him think within me, from acting for and with Jesus to letting him act through me. I know the only way for me to see the world is to see it through his eyes. Everything has to become very simple, very unified, very focused. It is no longer a question of being up

[483] This was partially due to his own struggle with his sexuality.

[484] Nouwen Henri J M., *Seeds of Hope: A Henri Nouwen Reader*, ed. Robert Durback (New York, NY: Darton, Longman + Todd, 1997), 5, 102; Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York, NY: Crown Publishing Group, 2013), 37; Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Finding Our Sacred Center: A Journey to Inner Peace* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2011); Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World* (New York, NY: John Murray Press, 2016).

to date or well-informed. At this moment in history - my own as well as that of the world - I have to go to the very center of being: the center where time touches eternity, where earth and heaven meet, where God's Word becomes human flesh, where death and immortality embrace. I know the only way we see the world is through Jesus' eyes.

    - To be chosen as the Beloved of God - pulling the truth revealed to me from above down into the ordinariness of what I am, in fact, thinking of, talking about, and doing from hour to hour - is something radically different. Instead of excluding others, it includes others. Instead of rejecting others as less valuable, it accepts others in their own uniqueness. It is not a competitive, but a compassionate choice.
    - The inward man is faced with a new and often dramatic task: He must come to terms with the inner tremendum. Since the God 'out there' or 'up there' is more or less dissolved in the many secular structures, the God within asks attention as never before. And just as the God outside could be experienced not only as a loving father but also as a horrible demon, the God within can be not only the source of a new creative life but also the cause of a chaotic confusion. The greatest complaint of the Spanish mystics St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross was that they lacked a spiritual guide to lead them along the right paths and enable them to distinguish between creative and destructive spirits.

- Howard Washington Thurman: a theologian, author, educator, civil rights leader, mystic, and philosopher understood liberation as freedom from oppression - to love our neighbors

is to see them as ourselves and treat them as ourselves. As such, Thurman was the co-founder of the first major interracial, interdenominational church in the United States.[485]

- The movement of the Spirit of God in the hearts of men often calls them to act against the spirit of their times or causes them to anticipate a spirit which is yet in the making. In a moment of dedication, they are given wisdom and courage to dare a deed that challenges and to kindle a hope that inspires.
- those people who live most obviously with their backs against the wall—for instance, the homeless, the working and jobless poor, the substance abused and abusers, the alienated, misguided, and essentially abandoned young people—are rarely within hearing or seeing range of the company of Jesus' proclaimed followers. The keepers of the faith of the master (the whole Body of God) often find it very difficult, and very dangerous, to follow Jesus into the hard places inhabited by the disinherited of AmeriKa. And those wall-bruised people find no space for their presence in the places where the official followers are comfortable at worship.
- The basic fact is that Christianity as it was born in the mind of this Jewish teacher and thinker appears as a technique of survival for the oppressed. That it became, through the intervening years, a religion of the powerful and the dominant, used sometimes as an instrument of oppression, must not tempt us into believing that it was thus in the mind and life of Jesus. Wherever his spirit appears, the oppressed gather fresh courage; for he announced the good news that fear, hypocrisy, and

[485] Howard Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream: The Story of the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009); Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2022), xxii, 29.

> hatred, the three hounds of hell that track the trail of the disinherited, need have no dominion over them.

While humanity works to embody the divine within - the *Self* - in the movement towards complete *gnosis*, the Black Body must consider the derivation of the institutionalized Black Church. Notably, without the presence of black Bodies in AmeriKa, European AmeriKans would not be "white." As seen throughout AmeriKa's history of assimilating Bodies with lighter hues towards whiteness, these lighter-hued bodies were once comparable and complementary to black bodies engaged in class, ethnic, and gender struggles over resources and bodily identity. Notably, therefore, White supremacist or Puritan ideology is based principally on the degradation of Black Bodies in order to control them. This can be witnessed in the dogmas and doctrines evangelized by puritan ideology to indoctrinate White Bodies unremittingly with the knowledge on how to perpetually control enslaved Black Bodies by creating fear and distrust among the enslaved bodies by causing divisiveness within the group. This White Body curriculum endorsed fragmentation - the breaking - of the "nigger" by:

> Pitching the Old Black Male versus the Young Black Male; Dark Skin Slaves versus the Light Skin Slaves; Female versus the Male; Mother versus Child, for by breaking her into complete submission, she will train her offspring to submit to labor; White Body versus Black Body, where white servants and overseers distrust all Blacks, while the enslaved loves, respects, depends upon, and trusts only White Bodies.[486]

Once under control and in perennial fear of these White Bodies, this fear is sustained by convincing Black Bodies that their Bodies - the Self - are ugly, their intellect is inherently underdeveloped, their culture less civilized, and their future warranting less concern than that of

[486] Lynch, *The Willie Lynch Letter and the Making of a Slave*, (Long Island City, NY: African Tree Press, 2017), 6-7, 10, 14, 25.

other Bodies. Meanwhile, White Bodies are distinguished by their ability to promote the sanctity of whiteness by devaluing that which is non-White.[487]

It is now from this Oppressed Body that a Black Body must be considered when the Black Body starts to look at the origin of when the belief systems and practices of the followers of "*a* Way"[488] was adopted and aligned itself with the temporal power of Constantine, the Royal Imagination of Empire. In this adoption, the belief system of the followers of Yeshua of Yehoshua (*Jesus the Nazarene*) became utterly distorted and ceased to be "*a* Way." These little Christs, a distinct movement within the diverse Body of first-century covenantal Judaism,[489] who had spread the ways and movements of the Yeshua of Yehoshua through oral traditions, became a re-creation of imperial domination and took on the moniker of Christianity. Prior to Rome's homogenization of Christianity, the religion of Rome was inexorably influenced by the tenets of Rome's leaders. Progressively, these empirical ethicalities became part of the institutionalized commonplace religious ideologies, whereby Caesar and Caesar's underlings became deities that had to be worshiped. As Rome's religious practices stemmed from the amalgamation of a mixture of the beliefs, traditions, and superstitions of the aristocracy, the adding of Christianity as the *Pax Romona's* official religion under the Constantinian shift was rudimental.[490]

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[487] Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2001), 85.; Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll, N.Y, NY: Orbis Books, 1999).

[488] Gregory K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 697-698, 701, Accessed August 3, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central. The Way is a symbolic movement of Jesus' followers from an unspiritual condition to the process of undergoing spiritual restoration, thereby identifying the *Ekklesia* as God's Body - The Body of God. In replacing "the" with the noun "a," I am indicating that Christianity is not the only way - "The Way" - to come into relation with the Most Divine.

[489] Marcus J. Borg, "A Chronological New Testament," in *Evolution of the Word: The New Testament in the Order the Books Were Written* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2012), pp. 1-10. The covenantal theology of the Jews held to a theology focused on radical monotheism: *God is one*, promise and hope: material provision for God's followers and God's desire for world justice and peace, observance: living according to the law.

[490] Valerie M. Warrior, "The Gods and Their Worship." In *Roman Religion*, 1-14. *Cambridge Introduction to Roman Civilization* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2006), doi:10.1017/CBO9780511814747.002.

It is under the empirical dominion of the Pax Romana that much of the documents and creeds of the followers of "*a* Way" were written.[491] The insertion of "*the* Way" into Roman polytheism[492] caused a great shift in the practices and belief systems of the Bodies of "*a* Way." Prior to its Roman colonizing appropriation, Jesus, the founder of "*a* Way," used parables with moral lessons to communicate his ethic of *agapē* love.[493] Jesus emphasized what Christians now call the Fruitage of the Spirit,[494] along with the assertation of the connection of the Most Divine with the divine within the Self.[495] In its post-Roman colonization and empirical domination, the belief system of "*the* Way"' experienced a mammoth shift in its moral ethos to an ethos replete with colonial Christianity. In the movement from a Romanized Christianity to the Puritan Christianity of AmeriKa, the Black Church has had a similar experience and is in the midst of still traversing the path from "*a* Way," and must work on demythologizing this Empirical Puritan Christianity. As already demonstrated, the Christian story did not drop from heaven fully written.

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[491] Ali Parchami, "The Pax Romana," in *Hegemonic Peace and Empire: The Pax Romana, Britannica, and Americana* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), pp. 31-57; Marcus J. Borg and Marcus J. Borg, "A Chronological New Testament," in *Evolution of the Word: The New Testament in the Order the Books Were Written* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2012), pp. 1-10. In Roman history, the Pax Romana was a time of relative peace and increased imperialism while the Roman Empire was at its biggest size extending from northern Britain to the coast of the Arabian Peninsula, and from the shores of the Atlantic to the Euphrates. Rome maintained a (1) politically oppressive regime: *the people had no voice or power*, (2) economically exploitive regime: *economy was built on the self-interest of the elites*, (3) chronically violent regime: *the elites held on through power by violent means*, (4) an Empire legitimated by religious claims: *Kings and Queens ruled by Divine right, and God put the division between to ruler and the slave*.

[492] The Romans looked for commutuality between their gods and those of the tenanted and oppressed Bodies of the Roman Empire. For the case of political peace (easiness) and prosperity and the historical assimilation of deities and traditions within the religious belief system of the Roman Empire, Roman Polytheism adopted myths, folklore, and art (imagination).

[493] The Apostle Paul attempts to evidence Jesus' *agapē* ethic: Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable; it keeps no record of wrongs; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends (1 Corinthians 13: 4-8a NRSV).

[494] The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22 NRSV).

[495] I (Jesus) ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their word that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be (one) in us…. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one (John 17: 20-23).

It has been under the hands of the potter, being molded on different potter's wheels throughout the millineas.

The movement of "*a* Way" has always been an evolving story, an unfinished narrative ever searching for a more authentic form of Christianity, a Christianity returning to the *agapē* ethic of the Messiah - Yeshua of Yehoshua. And this movement back toward the *agapē* ethic of Yeshua (Jesus) is no different from the call for the Black Bodies of the Black Church to move further along toward the *agapē* ethic of Christ. Understandably, nobody escapes being wounded, whether physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually, and this includes both the Black Church as an entity and the Black Bodies within that entity. Within the Black Church, one of the greatest pains impressed upon Black Bodies has to do with the issues of the racism of Puritan Christianity imposed upon the *spiritual word*.

Unequivocally, race is the child of racism; a process of naming Bodies and ascribing them into a hierarchical setting in which the belief in the preeminence of Bodies of a fairer hue are indelibly believed to be superior to Bodies of a darker hue. Both secularly and in the sacred realm of Christianity, race - or the oppression of what has been made the subservient body - is hate that gives identity. "The nigger, the fag, the bitch illuminate the border, illuminate what we ostensibly are not, illuminate the Dream of being white, of being a Man. We name the hated strangers - terrorists, despots, barbarians, and other enemies of civilization - and are thus falsely self-confirmed in the tribe of the privileged."[496] It is now, while still in the belly of a pregnant colonized puritan Christian ethic that the Black *faith* believers are called back, as a piece of wet clay, into the original potter's hands.[497]

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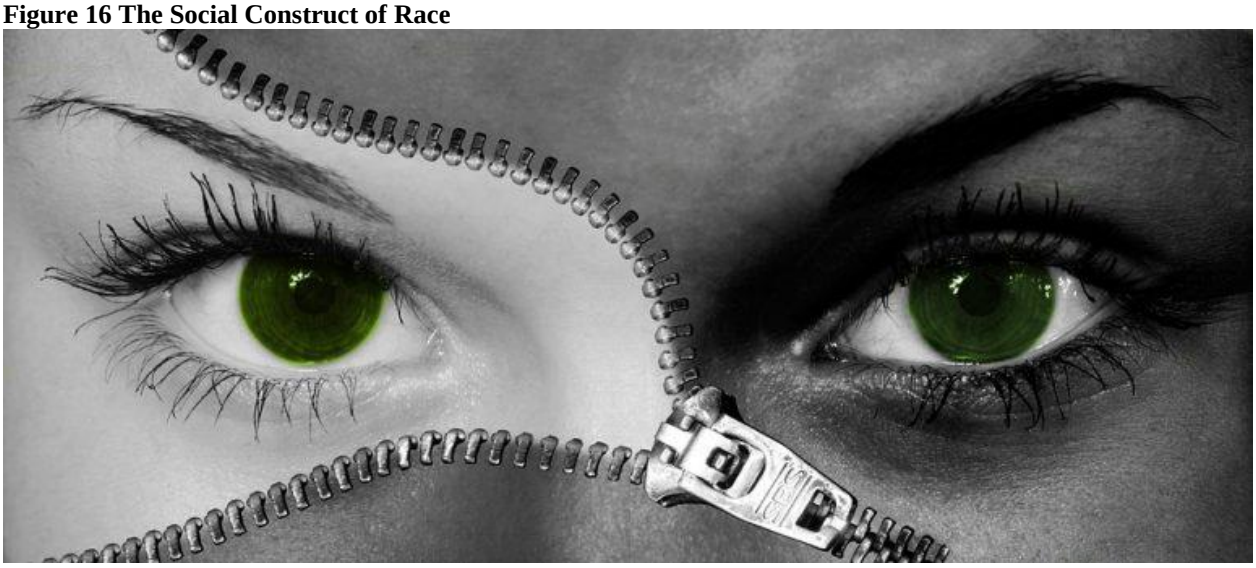
[496] Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York, NY: Random House Us, 2015), 7, 60.

[497] God told Jeremiah, "Up on your feet! Go to the potter's house. When you get there, I'll tell you what I have to say." So, I went to the potter's house, and sure enough, the potter was there, working away at his wheel. Whenever the pot the potter was working on turned out badly, as sometimes happens when you are working with

While being molded by the Master Potter on their journey towards the incarnation of the *agapē* love ethic, believers must recollect that there will be great opposition from those indoctrinated with the Royal Imagination, the guarantors of the status quo. The upholders of the Royal Imagination want to perpetuate the maintenance of the status quo as their perceived safety is only retained as long as they use their power to give the *othered* a sense of insecurity is kept intact.[498] In AmeriKa, one of the keys used as a means of control behavior by privileged Bodies, as counseled in the Willie Lynch Letter, is the divisiveness of race and culture. As race and culture touch everything, it is impossible to do any justice work, especially when related to the Most Divine and establishing a shift from colonial language to a prophetic language, without beginning with looking at race and culture in a theopoetic light.

Race

Figure 16 The Social Construct of Race



clay, the potter would simply start over and use the same clay to make another pot…. "Can't I do just as this potter does, people of Israel?" God's Decree! "Watch this potter. In the same way that this potter works his clay, I work on you, people of Israel (Jeremiah 18: 1-6 MSG)."

[498] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 14. This is done by controlling the behavior of those who are othered and oppressed.

Before looking at the concept of race, one must first start with the history of the human species, which comes from two wellsprings: paleo-anthropology and the historical corollaries of the human genome. Substantiated both biblically and scientifically, through existing fossils, modern humans originated in Africa. And the earliest modern human fossils found outside of Africa originate from the Middle East, nearly one hundred thousand years after the African fossils. As people moved out of Africa, scientists discovered that the African populations exhibit greater genetic diversity - a resource for adaptation of the species. As humans continued to migrate throughout Africa and into the rest of the world, the opportunity for the breakdown of humanity into more exclusive communities started.[499] This is the setting from which humanity begins to shift from oneness to a dangerous and divergent multiplicity - a social construction that gives or denies benefits and privileges to human Bodies. One of the most divisive divisions occurs in the construction of race.

The social construct of race as we know it today is a modern human invention forged historically through whiteness, oppression, slavery, and conquest, which evolved alongside the formation of the United States to describe and categorize people into various social groups based on characteristics like skin color, physical features, and genetic heredity as a process of ascribing social meaning to those groups.[500] Thus, the meaning and feeling of race shifted with the onset

[499] Joy A. Degruy Leary and Randall Robinson, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (Stone Mountain, GA: Joy DeGruy Publications Incorporated, 2017), iii. This was demonstrated in the division both of and in the desire to experience royal privilege through the differentiation of: gender roles, family, clan, village, nationality, ethnicity, and race. This is the theo-poetic greeting of the Massai Warrior tribe - *Kasserian Ingera*. The greeting of one of the fiercest warrior tribes known to humanity is - "and how are the Children?" - as they put a high value on the well-being of children, the future. The answer to the question - "All the Children are well" - references that peace and safety prevail, and that priorities of protecting the young, powerless, and the oppressed are in place.

[500] David R. Roedier, "Historical Foundations of Race," National Museum of African American History and Culture, October 11, 2019, https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/historical-foundations-race; Erin Blakemore, "Race and Ethnicity Facts and Information," Culture (National Geographic, May 3, 2021), https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/race-ethnicity.

and dissemination of White Puritan European colonialism and imperialism. While the concept of *race* originally functioned similarly to the conceptualization of the word ethnicity today - Bodies[501] connected by common descent or origin - the hunger for greater European colonialism and imperialism burgeoned as White Bodies encountered supposed deficient human Bodies from contradistinctive parts of the world. Standing in the privilege of their royal imagination, they speculated - in a diminutive way - about the physical, social, and cultural differences amongst human Bodies. These Royal Bodies[502] began to use *race* to categorize human Bodies through their own privileged lens, creating the social stratification operationalized out of the context of African enslavement. In her essay, *The Slavebody and the Blackbody*, Toni Morrison delves deep into the contextualization of race in AmeriKa. She states:

> When I use the term "slavebody" to distinguish it from "black-body," I mean to underscore the fact that slavery and racism are two separate phenomena. The origins of slavery are not necessarily (or even ordinarily) racist. Selling and owning people is old commerce. There are probably no people in the world whose ancestors were no slaves. If you are Christian, among your people were slaves; if you are Jewish, among your people were slaves; if you are Hindu, among your people were slaves; if you are Buddhist, among your people were slaves; if you are Muslim, among your people were the enslaved. If your ancestors are European, they lived under the serfdom of eastern Europe, the tenancy of feudalism in England, in Viking Querope, Visigothic Spain, Venice, Genoa, and Florence. The majority of the population of ancient Rome, ancient Greece, Medieval Ghana, Songhai Mali, the Dahomey, and Ashanti kingdoms all were deliberately constructed slave societies. Slavery was critical to the world of Islam and systematic in the Orient. We are all implicated in the institution of enslavement. However, the colonists of the New World, in following the pattern of societies dependent on free labor, enslaved Indigenous Bodies and would have imported any foreign group available, capable, and survivable. And the foreigners from Africa - Black Bodies - fit the bill because they were clever, strong, adaptable, creative, spiritual, and intensely interested in their children.[503]

Accordingly Royal Bodies, and most of the world-wide society began to forget that the belief that a person's race innately determined and justified their social superiority or inferiority to

[501] "Bodies" has nothing to do with identity, nationality, or ethnicity. In this sentence, Bodies literally means that people live in a structure that is predicated on pigmentality. A structure that determines who is human or who is not based on pigment. White Bodies have deemed themselves as the Supreme structure by which everything else will be judged.

[502] I am using the term Royal Bodies synonymously with White Bodies and Privileged Bodies.

[503] Toni Morrison, "The Slavebody and the Blackbody," in *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2021), pp. 74-78. While agreeing with the fact that practically everyone has an ancestor that was enslavement, enslavement in AmeriKa is this only enslavement in which Bodies were treated as chattel and non-human.

other Bodies was contrived. Rather, it bolstered the idea of White Body Supremacy, where the White Body deemed and continually deems itself the supreme standard by which all human Bodies shall be measured structurally and philosophically. There is no identity that White Bodies are that Bodies of culture also are. And it is through AmeriKa's enduring structure of the plantation, and White Body privilege that these Royal Bodies ascribing direct lineage to Jesus Chirst - being more godly, more human, more intelligent, more moral, and more capable than those who were not white - fully ascribed to a movement and belief system which was antithetical to the *agapē* love ethic of Yeshua of Yehoshua.[504]

AmeriKa's history, enduringly based on the structure of the plantation, demonstrates the very fact that at its inception, "whiteness" was not viewed in the same way as it is in AmeriKa today. The first Bodies that the Puritans attempted to enslave and place on AmeriKa's plantations were the poor of England and Ireland - the oppressed and those of differing ethnicity. At that time, White and Black indentured servants and the enslaved were treated the same way. Being in the same metaphorical boat, the oppressed human Bodies,[505] regardless of skin color, joined together to revolt or run away from their enslavers enduringly. Albeit both classes of Bodies ran away together - slave and servant, black and white - punishment for Black Bodies were much more severe, to the point of the first legal sanctioning of lifelong slavery.[506] Yet, as

[504] Kate Berg et al., eds., "The Use of Racial, Ethnic, and Ancestral Categories in Human Genetics Research," *The American Journal of Human Genetics* 77, no. 4 (2005): pp. 519-532, https://doi.org/10.1086/491747, 519-532; David R. Roediger, "Historical Foundations of Race," National Museum of African American History and Culture, December 16, 2021, https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/historical-foundations-race. I am here intentionally using the term Jesus Christ as this is the Latinized version of the Aramaic Yeshua.

[505] Remember that in AmeriKa's journey to becoming a nation, non-white Bodies started being considered as other than fully human.

[506] Rodney D. Coates, "Law and the Cultural Production of Race and Racialized Systems of Oppression: Early American Court Cases," *American Behavioral Scientist* (Sage Journals, November 1, 2003), https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0002764203256190. 329-351. In one 1640 court case in Virginia, three servants - Victor, "a Dutchman," and James Gregory, "a Scotchman," and John Punch, "a Negro"- belonging to Hugh Gwyn, who had run away were captured and returned. Victor and James Gregory were each sentenced to be beaten and have four years added to their indentures. Antagonistically, the third servant, John Punch's punishment,

these enslaved White Bodies started to step into their Royal Bodies - White Body Privilege - they realized that as they ran away from their enslavers, they could hide in plain sight and not be sought.[507] Upon apprehending the economic impact of having these new, purloined, Royal Bodies under oppression, White Bodies soon changed AmeriKa's laws to protect these newly amalgamated White Bodies, enabling these Bodies to then collectively have little or no efficacy or agility regarding the definition of Race. The thirteen colonies were filled with Colonized White Bodies who were fleeing their present, and upon arriving in the "New World," a present which had become past they never had to go back and process and resolve. As brutalized and oppressed bodies in their own right, they learned the template of both the victim and the perpetrator. With an opportunity to remove themselves from oppression, the Bodies moved from victim to perpetrator, intentionally weaving anti-blackness and Indigenous invisibility into the very structure that makes up AmeriKa and our Global System. Henceforth, due to racial animus, the enslaved - Black Bodies - came to be defined by the color of their skin.[508]

Race touches everything, and it is impossible to do any justice work, expressly when related to the Most Divine, without beginning with race. For Black Bodies and the Black Church, Chattel Slavery plays a significant part in their spiritual belief systems. So much so, that for the Puritan Christianity of AmeriKa, the Black Church has greatly assisted the colonizer: backing its ventures, helping its conscience, and promoting its theological belief system over their

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was much more severe. John, who, similar to his running mates, ran away as an indentured servant. Upon his capture, John was sentenced to become the first official slave in AmeriKa. This decision to permanently enslave John Punch represents the first legal distinction between Europeans and Africans, Blacks and Whites.

[507] Menakem, *Somatic Abolitionism*, 2022. Racism and White Body Supremacy/Privilege is not about Hatred First. It's about self Interest First. Hatred is a useful byproduct of that self-interest - something the middle and lower classes can grab onto.

[508] Menakem, Somatic Abolitionism, 2022.

indigenous beliefs as a Body of "the Way" throughout its history.[509] In standing alongside the evangelizing of a puritan Christianity, the Black Church has internalized and promoted the acceptance of colonization, seemingly repudiating and forgetting the poverty and misery, the inequality and divisions, the conflict and violence that afflict Black Bodies and the Black Church beginning with the genocide of enslavement, the political oppression and economic exploitation of Blackness, and the cultural debasement that these Puritan Bodies put on Blackness. Thus, it is now time for Black Bodies and the Black Church to journey further into the ministry of *agapē* love. This prophetic ministry seeks to "nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us,[510] especially knowing that we, the members of the church, have to unlearn habits, unlearn practices, unlearn rituals, and unlearn belief and faith systems that have served us well, and brought us to a semblance of liberation.

The question that must then be considered is what do our faith traditions say to the poor, the disinherited, and the dispossessed? Our ancestors - Black Bodies - have already left examples of journeying in an *agapē* love ethic by walking in their prophetic imagination. Interreligious Faith leaders, from enslavement unto today, have left us examples, taking, and currently using their imagination to reconnect the divine within to the most Divine.[511] In doing so, they have moved, and we continue to move toward healing from the oppressive substratum of the

[509] Menakem, *Somatic Abolitionism*, 2022. While the black body and indigenous body is where AmeiKa has been taught to do its dirt. Black, Brown, and Othered Bodies have also been conditioned to shovel the same manure on Bodies that resemble our own Bodies while we simultaneously have been taught to hold that dirt. That is the design originated in the Plantation. Additionally, the use of "the way" here is intentional, as Puritan Christianity believes that their belief system was and is the only way to have a relationship with the most Divine.

[510] Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination, 3.

[511] "divine" being the divinity found inside of the human Body as they are made in the *imago* and *imitatio Dei*, and "Divine" as in the Most Divine Being.

colonizers by confronting the institution of chattel slavery.[512] This prophetic imaginary was invoked by the Social Gospelers and Civil Rights Leaders and continues to be invoked today in the fight against new forms of oppression, evidencing that this is not just a liberation of the Body but of a spiritual one as well. Below are a few examples of this prophetic imaginary journeying:

- The Haitian Revolution: both a social and economic insurrection – represents one of the genuinely noteworthy achievements in the chronicles of world history. In combat against one of the greatest military minds of that time, Napoléon Bonaparte, and the French Empire, the interfaith revolutionists' - both male and female - accomplishments were bold and farsighted in their attempt to advance universal human rights during the early nineteenth century. The Haitian revolution completely changed the course of history and the relations between all the peoples of the earth. Toussaint L'Ouverture, Dutty Bookman, Cécile Fatiman, Abdaraya Toya, and the other organizers of the revolution played an inordinately important role in articulating a version of human rights as it formed only the second independent state in modern history. As the first free Black Republic of the "new world," Ayiti sought to promote equality for all Black Bodies in a world and political system that was systematized and manipulated by overwhelmingly White Bodies. Under Ayiti's new independent political state, as ratified in the Haitian Constitution of 1802 and 1804, all citizens were legally equal, regardless of color, race, or condition. The nation promoted a new Bodily reality that – *tout neg se neg*: all people are people. In order to understand the Haitian role in the development of human rights, it is vitally important to examine the context of that unusual revolution. The Haitian Revolution represents the most thorough case study of revolutionary change anywhere in

[512] Colonization is not a one-time event but a perpetual daily happening.

the history of the modern world. In ten years of sustained internal and international warfare, a colony populated predominantly by plantation slaves overthrew both its colonial status and its economic system. These now formerly enslaved bodies then established a new, independent political state of entirely free individuals - with former slaves constituting the new political authority.[513]

- Nathaniel Turner: was born as the enslaved child of an enslaved African Native, Nancy, who deposited a passionate hatred of chattel slavery to her son, as well as the African folk traditions of her homeland.[514] Contemporaneously, Turner was deeply indoctrinated in the Christian faith, sharing the religion of his devout Grandmother and his enslavers. As a child, Turner learned to read and write and had uncommon inquisitiveness, intelligence, and a great imagination. Soon Turner became a spirited preacher and shepherd of the enslaved, claiming that he was chosen by God to lead God's enslaved sheep out of bondage. This call came after Turner had run away from, enslavement and he experienced a theophany[515] where the Spirit appeared to him, directing him to return towards the movement of the heavenly things, which could only be accomplished if Turner returned to the service of his earthly master as an enslaved Body. Upon his return, Turner used the religious syncretism - of his Ancestral Spirituality and traditional Indigenous practices, his Christian Faith practices, and the belief that God is still

[513] James, *The Black Jacobins*, 18.

[514] Menakem, *Somatic Abolitionism*, 2022. The psychological, emotional, physical, spiritual, and social distress brought on by slavery creates an existence defined by perpetual trauma, abuse, and objectification.

[515] Nat Turner, *The Confessions of Nat Turner, the Leader of the Late Insurrection in Southampton, Virginia*, ed. Thomas R. Gray (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2011), 16, 18. Turner believed that God actively directed him through revelation, signs, scriptures, visions, and dreams to defend himself and other oppressed Bodies from the dehumanization aspect of enslavement. Instead, Turner was called as a Prophet and revolutionary for igniting violent insurrections to advance the Kin-dom principles of freedom, equality, liberation, justice, and salvation. With his limited resources, Turner could use his prophetic imagination to see a means of liberation in the little Biblical narratives of the Slave Bible, which was exclusive of any of the liberationist passages.

communicating with the world to act upon his direct liberation from slavery by subverting and challenging the legal slave-system for collective emancipation. The Nat Turner rebellion and the violence that went along with the rebellion was, in actuality, an act of self-defense against the White Advantage[516] by enslaved Bodies. Turner and his group of obstructionists and agitators moved systematically from plantation to plantation, the plantation being the backbone of the AmeriKan and the global cultural structure, to neutralize as many Advantaged White Bodies connected to slavery. Turner's rebellion was so daunting that it briefly caused the Virginia legislature to consider gradual emancipation. However, because of the need for Advantaged Bodies to uphold the culture of White Body Supremacy, Turner's rebellion led to strictures against the activities of both enslaved and free Black Bodies.[517]

- Resmaa Menakem: is a Psychotherapist, Justice Leadership Coach, and Author whose work is focused in the areas of leadership and self-care. Menakem effectuates his work under the aegis of the somatic field, where he has centered the bodies healing from the effects of White Body Supremacy, racism, and trauma. To empower Bodies to better understand their past and present successes and obstacles. Menakem's embodied approach - Somatic Abolitionism - is a living embodied philosophy that requires endurance, stamina, discernment, and resilience - what Menakem calls "doing the reps" - for growth. Like the *agapē* ethic of Jesus, Menakem teaches those who are under his tutelage that:
    - We are not defective.

[516] I use advantage here instead of White Privilege because "privilege" denotes a choice as to whether or not you will leverage the asset of Whiteness.

[517] Turner, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, 16, 18.

- We are enough.
- The fuel we need for our liberation is the fuel we are trying to get rid of. Instead, we need to metabolize that fuel, and use it as fuel for our freedom.
- Once we can walk into our whole Self, the divine within can emerge and the love that radiates can move us towards the peace and justice emphasized in the biblical narratives.

Thus, it is from its genesis that the Black Church found its prophetic and political beginnings in the struggle for *liberation* and *justice*. Nevertheless, the process of liberation brings with it a profound conflict. More than having the project or the call is required. What is necessary is a spirituality of resistance and a renewed hope to turn ever back to the struggle in the face of the defeats of the oppressed.[518] In the audacity to stand up and continue inching ever closer to realizing our full potential of the divinity within through the embodiment of a Christ like *agapē* ethic, we will begin to deconstruct and re-imagine our embedded Royal Imagination into a Prophetic Imagination - the God inside me, inside you, and inside everybody else. Thus far, the Black Body and the Black Church have not been able to fully embody the Prophetic *agapē* ethic because of the embedded vestiges of colonialism.[519] However, we must continue to traverse into the embodiment of *agapē*, for the future is not something hidden in a corner. The future is something we build in the present.[520] The question remains: why do we - the Black

[518] Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987).

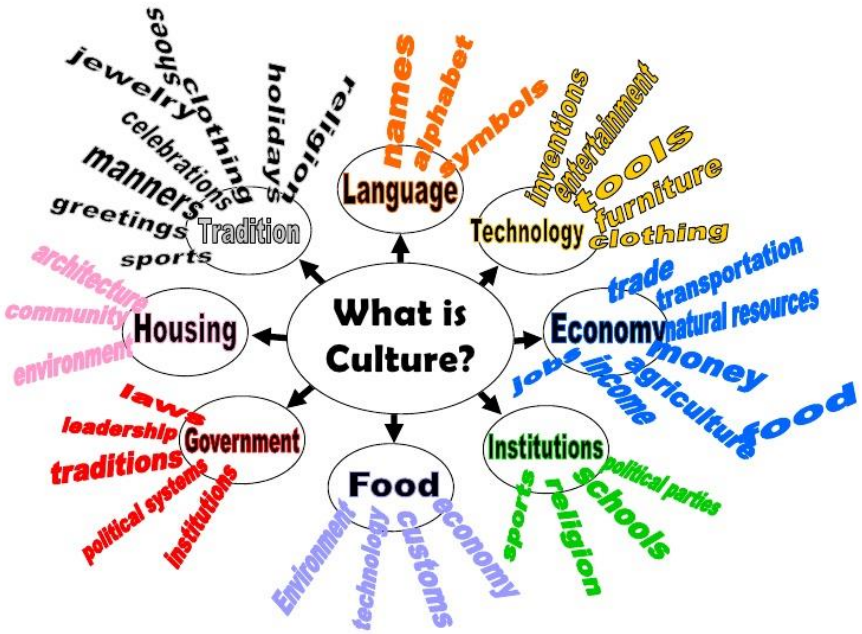
[519] In the violent process of colonization, the minds of Black Bodies are colonized when these Bodies internalize their oppression, become diffident and self-denigrating, believe they are inferior to the colonizer, and acquiesce to their colonization with honor instead of seeing it as the vice of oppression. In ingesting colonization, we are fully exposed and susceptible to the dis-ease of White Body Privilege, and we align with White Bodies as a means of dealing with the dis-ease that we feel!

[520] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2018), 34, 52.

Body and the Black Church - continue to trust and affirm this white-puritan-colonized faith system as *the* criteria for worship?

CHRISTIAN CULTURE / BLACK CULTURE

Figure 17 What is Culture?



Another aspect of Bodiness in regard to race is culture - race culture (See figure 21.).[521] Culture, a notoriously difficult term to define because of the multifarious usages of the term, is a

[521] Zev M. Trachtenberg, *Making Citizens: Rousseau's Political Theory of Culture* (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2003), 249; Clyde Kluckhohn and Alfred Louis Kroeber, *Culture, a Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (Cambridge, MA: The Meseum, 1952: 181); Nancy J. Adler and Allison Gundersen, *International Dimensions of Organizational Behavior* (Mason, OH: Thomson South-Western, 1997), 14; Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups. The essential core of culture consists of traditional (historically derived and selected) products of actions on the other, as conditional elements of future actions.

quality possessed by all people in all social groups. It is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by humanity as a member of society. Nonetheless, there is a certain aspect of uniqueness which the many and varied cultures of different Bodies or societies hold. As such, it is pertinent that one should never differentiate nor differentially valorize cultures as savage, barbaric, or civilized.[522] The cultural aspect of race is at the core of everyBody's identity, and it is therefore innately at the core of a person's faith identity. In moving back to the start of AmeriKa, the plantation, the concept of race became directly tied to the species question. There is no identity that white bodies are that bodies of culture also are.[523] If we were to retrace AmeriKa's steps, we would find that the thirteen colonies were filled with Colonized White Bodies who were fleeing something that never got dealt with. Yet, in their flight, these White Bodies never experienced the same happenings as Black Bodies - at least not long term. And in building this "New Land," the Colonizers organized the "New World" by mimicking the same surf/king relationship they had experienced before their migration. Their imagination brought them back to a place of brutalization, and in their oppression, they learned both the victim's and the perpetrator's template. Thus, they formed AmeriKa's most enduring institutional structure, the plantation - the plantation-organized White Bodies!

In post-Plantation AmeriKa, pigmentocracy[524] determines what species you are. Wherever you go in this world, the darker the Bodies, the more you see monkey symbolism. Unfortunately, because of the weightiness of race on Black Bodies - the oppressed - the cultural

[522] Kevin Avruch, *Culture & Conflict Resolution* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1998), 6-7.

[523] Menakem, Somatic Abolitionism, 2022.

[524] Pigmentocracy overrides the distinctions of class, gender, religion, and ethnic origin, with members of the society using skin color as the most important parameter for judging other members of society.

appropriation of violence is a personal necessity and is not a method deliberately devised. It is the deep, instinctive expression of a human being denied individuality, and one's only rescue is through a conciliatory rebellion and revolution.[525] For me, the closest definition of culture broken down in a theological setting leans towards the understanding of Hofstede, which states that culture is the collective programming - basic shared assumptions, values, and beliefs - of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another Body.[526] It is this elusive term "culture," which both unites and fractionates Bodies and has a far-reaching impact on our everyday actions, thoughts, and belief systems. Consequently, all cultures are characterized by constant change and must adapt to environmental changes. This urgent desideratum for social change has given rise to global conflicts associated with ethnicity, religion, and ethical beliefs.

Additionally, this unseen culture

- Affects Perception: Our culture establishes and regulates the structure of our thinking, which manipulates our perceptions
- Influences Behavior: Perceptions actuate and mold our behavior.
- Shapes Our Personalities: As a whole, humanity tends to follow herd mentality. Thus, for an individual - a Body - to be accepted as a part of the group, that Body tends to follow what the group decides for them. Hence, it is in the attempt to fulfill that herd mentality, that we shape ourSelves to suit the Royal Imagination.

It is impossible for an individual growing up in a given community not to be indoctrinated into that particular culture's attitudes and beliefs - the way people are supposed to behave, look, and

[525] Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1966), 395.

[526] Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2001), 9.

even think - even if they consciously resist such indoctrination. When this cultural appropriation happens collectively, as indeed it must whenever there is a collection of people, the development and progression of a culture inevitably occurs, as each person's attitudes and behaviors necessarily influence others' perceptions, as well as their attitudes and behaviors, which can be seen to have a cyclical effect.

Shift of Our Christianity

Colonization is the preamble to every injustice Black and Indigenous Bodies experience through White Body Privilege. Nearly six centuries ago, Pope Nicholas V charged the Holy Catholic Church with the Christian holy duty to enslave any and all non-Christian Bodies they encounter. The Pope's mandate would be the first recorded international edict granting a Christian nation the authority to endorse, advance, enforce, and immeasurably profit in perpetuity from slave trading.[527] The AmeriKan Christianity was forged from the dung[528] of this country, and innately at the very heart of White Christianity is oppression. This oppressive Church-State, whose precedence is based on greed and self-interest, was at the center of the moral issue of enslavement and the school-to-prison pipeline. Thus, the cyclical effect of race and culture both birthed out of and contingent on the establishment and upkeep of the Plantation, has been imposed on the Black Church and Indigenous faith traditions. Furthermore, as seen within the experience of all of humanity, when a child is birthed, time must elapse prior to the commencement of individuation. Taking baby steps towards consciousness, the birthed Body can

[527] Pius Onyemechi Adiele, *The Popes, the Catholic Church and the Transatlantic Enslavement of Black Africans 1418*-1839 (Volume 16), Library.oapen.org (Georg Olms Verlag, 2017), accessed January 27, 2021, https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/46336.

[528] Bible Hub, ed, "Strong's Greek: 4657. σκύβαλον (Skubalon) -- Refuse," *Biblehub.com*, last modified 2022, accessed August 10, 2022, https://biblehub.com/greek/4657.htm. σκύβαλον: the refuse, the filthy scraps of garbage, what is good-for-nothing except to be discarded (Philippians 3:8 NRSV).

start to recognize another Body as such and is able to react with a smile, and it is years before the child ceases to confuse itself with the universe.[529] The Black Church continues to move through the point at which it sees itself tied with the views of the White Church, the method by which all things non-White beings and entities are judged. Education, especially theological education, functions both as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and as an instrument to bring about conformity ~ to facilitate a prophetic imaginative tool which brings about liberation. In dealing with this binary within a theological setting, the Black Church raised under the guise of the - symbols: masculinity of god, fatherskygod, the toxic masculinity of god, slavery's white christ, whitemalegod - must rediscover how to participate in the transformation of its world so that both physical Bodies and the Church Body can be jointly responsible for a process in which all grow, as the future is not something hidden, but something that is built intentionally with the use of the imagination.[530]

- masculinity of god: Many Christians have been programmed and therefore evangelized others with the notion that God is always near.[531] But the *god* that many Oppressed Bodies experience and are convinced to trust are embedded in us from our progenitors, including AmeriKan Society - as seen at Church, stained-glass windows, on TV, US bills and coins, capitalistic economies.
- fatherskygod: references the distinctly patriarchal transcendent male god who only deals with spiritual matters, not physical matters, offering escape from the natural into the static peace of timelessness and freedom, detached from humanity except to dominate

[529] Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), 23, 28.

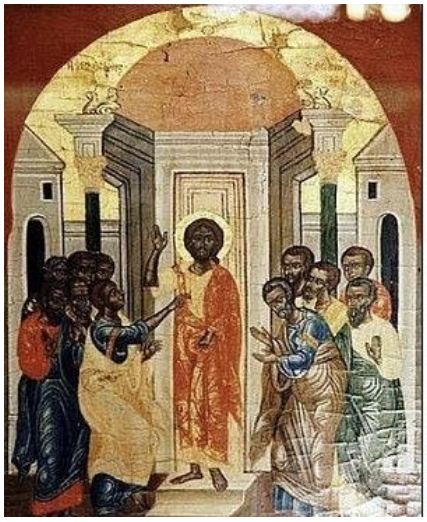
[530] Cleveland, "In God We Can't Trust: The Problem of Whitemalegod," in *God Is a Black Woman*, pp. 22-51; Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 34, 52.

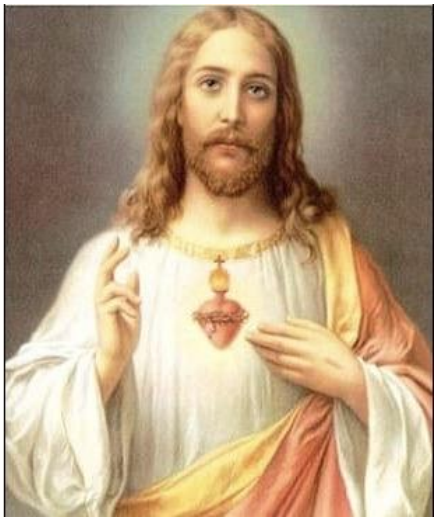
[531] The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing (Zephaniah 3:17 KJV). Watch for this—a virgin will get pregnant and bear a son; They will name him Immanuel (Hebrew for "God is with us") (Matthew 1:22-23 MSG).

them. This fatherskygod is not present when Oppressed Bodies need the Most Divine's presence the most. However, fatherskygod did not always exist. Fatherskygod came into prominence during the Mesolithic period when Indo-Europeans invaded and colonized the global south.

- The toxic masculinity of god: Male god is a patriarchal myth that attempts to declare that men are more sacred than women, non-binary, and gender-expansive Bodies, as male god's primary allegiance is with men and toxic masculinity. Masculinity only works when it is influenced by femininity. The positive feminine influence was removed in the creation narrative when the Serpent - seen throughout ancient history as the divine feminine and feminine wisdom - was transformed into a deceiver.
- slavery's white christ: ancillary to God's maleness is the cultural imposition of God's whiteness. Furthermore, in Christianity, the preeminent conceptualization of God can be seen in the Body of Jesus Christ. The earliest image of Jesus Christ closely resembles God's emBodiedness in Yeshua of Yehoshua, an Oppressed Body surrounded by Oppressed Bodies. Yeshua's context was not the commonplace example of the White Body Privilege Jesus of white supremacy depicted today (See figure 22.). This hierarchy of race empowered slave-holding whites as superior to all other Bodies and closest to God. But, White Bodies within the White Church encountered a moral dilemma in their participation in the enslavement of Black Human Bodies because Yeshua looked just like the enslaved people. Thus, White Bodies invented the *white christ*, who made a statement about who God is and whom God cares about.

Figure 18: Image Comparison of Jesus Christ





- White male God: continues to justify the oppression of Oppressed Bodies while dwelling among, identifying with, and protecting the power of white Bodies and cisgender men.

The division between man and woman,[532] black and white, human and species, similarly ripped the AmeriKan church into pieces. And in its brokenness over the question of species - the questioning of if *all* Bodies are made in the image, likeness, and imitation of the Most Divine, and thereby *all* Bodies are divine as well - that AmeriKan Christianity's oppressive nature was cultivated. This oppressive Christianity has shaped AmeriKa's theological perspective, AmeriKa's view on Christ, AmeriKa's intolerance of diversity, and AmeriKa's view and tool on how to treat those who appear *other* than the preset standards for AmeriKan appearance. Cone, the founder of Black Liberation Theology, clearly diagnosed the problem, noting that:

> Racism is deeply embedded in American religion and society. We cannot get rid of it by forgetting the past and simply urging blacks and whites to develop a good will toward each other. Racism is a cancer. To get rid of this deadly disease requires radical surgery that cuts deep into not only the "body politic" but also the body of Christ.[533]

[532] Menakem, *Somatic Abolitionism*, 2022. White Bodies - and specifically white cisgendered male Bodies - are the epitome of humanness, causing all other Bodies to be judged as only partially human, or as a different species.

[533] James H. Cone, *Malcolm & Martin & America: A Dream or A Nightmare* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 296.

In moving deeper towards decolonization and away from colonial understanding, the Black Church must realize that it has greatly assisted the colonialists: backing their ventures, helping their conscience, contributing to the continued acceptance of colonization - corporeal and spiritually - even by the oppressed and colonized. Some of the ways by which the Black Church propagates colonialism, similar to the Christian religious groups who established the British colonies following a model formed in the context of the Roman Empire, propagating that:[534]

- The ultimate goal of the *Imperium*/center is to bring all peoples under the control of the *Imperium,* giving them order, culture, and civilization.
- One faction of Bodies subjugates another, exploiting its population while forcing its own religious language, value, and culture upon "believers."
- Mandating the enforcing of strict religious observance and mandating that Bodies who practice, evangelize, or proselytize a different Christianity or a non-Christian faith are sometimes persecuted.
- People living outside of the *Imperium* are without law, culture, and morals.
- Differing Christian groups believe that their practices and faiths provide unique values that need protection against those who disagree, driving a need for rule and regulation.
- There is a need to create new markets for the colonizer: an extension of the colonizer's way of life beyond its national borders.
- The *Imperium* is the political expression of an ordered life.
- The world is divided between civilized and uncivilized.

[534] Mieke van der Linden, "Chapter 3: Imperium," In *The Acquisition of Africa (1870–1914)*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill | Nijhoff, 2016), 51-69, doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004321199_004.

- Those considered pious and virtuous are compliant and loyal to the *Imperium*.

While Bodies birthed out of the African diaspora historically are more Christian than Caucasian Bodies, African Bodies embraced Christianity long before the Christian faith irradiated on Anglo-Saxon soil. As one of the most dynamic centers of Christianity in the world, Africa is one of the places where Christianity was anchored, and its cohabitation with Islam and African traditional religions only deepened believers' openness and faith. Both within the Gospels and through modern archeology, we learn about African followers of "*a* Way," as demonstrated by Yeshua of Yehoshua.

- Simon of Cyrene: comes from modern-day Libya, a trade coastal outpost and colony of the Roman Empire, holding many Jewish settlers. According to the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke, Simon was in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. Additionally, Cyrenians were present in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10 NRSV).[535]
- Apollos: was a Hellenized Jewish follower of the way who hailed from Alexandria, Egypt, the second largest city in the Roman Empire. When Apollos first enters the picture in the Book of Acts, he is a disciple of John, well-versed in the scriptures, and evangelizing "in the Way of the Lord" with "burning enthusiasm and accuracy the things concerning Jesus in the Temple." After further instruction from Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos became known as a contemporary and colleague of the Apostle Paul, playing an imperative role in the early advancement of the churches of Ephesus and Corinth (Acts 18:24-28 NRSV).[536]

[535] Richard Neff, *Simon of Cyrene: The Cross-Bearer's Legacy: A Story of the Faith and the Trials of Early Christians* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2013), x, http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=none&isbn=9781449795207.

[536] Patrick J. Hartin, "Who Is Apollos?," in *Apollos Paul's Partner or Rival?* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), pp. 1-6.

- The Ethiopian Eunuch: the court official of the Queen of the Ethiopians, was returning from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 16:16 NRSV) and was reading through Isaiah when Philip encountered this ambiguous Body. After hearing the gospel proclamation of Yeshua of Yehoshua (the lived life of Jesus the *tekton*), the Ethiopian Eunuch brought the good news back to Ethiopia. Thus, to this day, a large portion of the Christian Church in Ethiopia claims the Ethiopian Eunuch as its founder (Acts 8: 26-40 NRSV).[537]
- Church Fathers: African Bodies were prolific and plentiful amongst the framers of Christian faith, history, and theology.[538]
    - Tertullian of Carthage: is considered the creator of the Latin Christian theological language, and wrote on a wide range of theological issues. He is best known for his apologetics against paganism and Judaism, his polemics, and the whole reorganization of human life on a Christian basis.
    - Cyprian of Carthage: was a rhetorician and lawyer who converted to Christianity and wrote extensively on the unity of the Church and orthodoxy. His writings were eminently important in the development of Christian thought and practice.
    - Athanasius of Alexandria: As the "Father of Christian orthodoxy," Athanasius was crucial to the development of the early church's Trinitarian theology, as he

[537] Sean D. Burke "Introduction." In *Queering the Ethiopian Eunuch: Strategies of Ambiguity in Acts*, 1–18. 1517 Media, 2013. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt22h6s0c.3. Here is a biblical character who seems to embody multiple differences of religion, class, race, gender, and sexuality as well. Comprehensive examination of the Ethiopian traveler's place in ancient society in relation to standard categories uncovers a fascinating, multifaceted character who defies easy classification.

[538] Alister E. McGrath and Gi-Chun So, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought (*Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

was the preeminent defender against Arianism, the belief that Jesus was a creature of like, but not of the same, substance as God.

  - Augustine of Hippo: is plausibly the most influential theologian and philosopher in the history of Christianity. He adapted Empirical Platonic thought into Christian teaching and created a powerful theological system shaping the practice of biblical exegesis consequently laying the foundation for much of Christian thought.
  - Origen of Alexandria: Alive during a time of little doctrinal consensus, Origen became one of the first theologians to offer an alternative Christian system to the more speculative mythological systems of the varying Christian sects. His writings centralize that God's providence seeks to restore all souls to their original blessedness, even the soul of Satan who was not beyond repentance and salvation.

- Archaeological finds in Ethiopia, highlight the discovery of what is believed to be the earliest Christian church on the continent of Africa. This Church was built around 313, when Roman Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity.[539]

Though Christianity later became preponderant in Europe and America, the assertion that it is a White man's religion is neither historically accurate nor theologically correct. Thus we - Oppressed Bodies and the Black Church - must interrogate how we can remove the colonial lens of puritan theology, empirical systems as they relate the Christian principles, and racial and gender oppression as they relate the Christian principles. My belief is that our interrogation will show us that we can do this by leaning into Holy Scriptures and, in particular, in this setting, the

[539] Andrew Lawler, "Church Unearthed in Ethiopia Rewrites the History of Christianity in Africa," *Smithsonian Magazine* (Smithsonian Institution, December 10, 2019), https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/church-unearthed-ethiopia-rewrites-history-christianity-africa-180973740/.

teachings and actions of Yeshua. Remember, as it was written, unlike other ancient books, the Bible was not the literature of a major, regional, or ruling class. Alternatively, the Bible was written to uplift the minor, remote, oppressed members of society as the literature for the critics of Bodies to hold a Royal Imagination. These oppressed Bodies refused to accept their world as it was. They knew inexorably in their souls that although their oppressor used *God* to sustain their oppression, their ancestors and the spiritual beliefs of the past did not match what they were being indoctrinated with. Thus, they went into their Prophetic Imagination to conceive a reformed theological belief system set on political dissent, social justice, and hope.[540]

Today, much of what passes for as gospel propagation actually equates to acts of oppression, the evangelistic impulse to spread the *good news* and save everyone's soul while contemporaneously dismissing oppressed bodies, along with their land or their dignity.[541] Thus, during the violent process of colonization Black Bodies and Black Bodies of Faith internalize and embody their oppression, become diffident and self-denigrating, believe they are inferior to the colonizer, and acquiesce to their colonization viewing it with honor instead of seeing it as the vice of oppression fashioned in the depths of hell. The antithesis of the colonized mind is the decolonized mind. The only means by which the Black Church can actively move further towards liberation today is by moving to decolonize the Black Church.[542] This decolonization, which sets out to change the theological order in the implementation of the Word, is a historical

[540] Amos Elon, *Jerusalem: Battlegrounds of Memory* (New York, NY: Kodansha International, 1995), 19.

[541] Mark Van Steenwyk, David Fitch, and Jin Kim, *The Unkingdom of God Embracing the Subversive Power of Repentance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 24.

[542] Andrea Smith, "Decolonization in Unexpected Places: Native Evangelicalism and the Rearticulation of Mission." *American Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (2010): 569–90. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40983420. Decolonization is the intelligent, calculated, and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and/or exploitation of your minds, bodies, and lands, and it is engaged for the ultimate purpose of overturning the colonial structure and realizing Indigenous liberation . . . But make no mistake: Decolonization ultimately requires the overturning of the colonial structure. It is not about tweaking the existing colonial system to make it more Indigenous-friendly or a little less oppressive. The existing system is fundamentally and irreparably flawed.

process which cannot take place unnoticed: that is to say it cannot be understood, it cannot become intelligible nor clear to itself except in the exact measure that we can discern the movements which give it historical form and content. Decolonization is the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature, putting into practice the word of the parable of the Vineyard "the last will be first, and the first will be last, for many are called, but few are chosen (Matthew 20:16 NRSV footnote of other ancient authorities added)" - a calling of the colonial plight into question and resisting against the colonial structure of subjugation.[543]

An inquisition towards decolonization cannot easily be implanted onto pre-existing dogma, doctrine, and disquisitions, even if they are critical frameworks by which we - the Black Church and Black Bodies - have started a trickle towards justice rolling down like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24 NRSV). The main source of resistance to theological inquiry - a move further into the *love ethic* of Jesus - is fear. The refusal to make any improvement, lest we should be guilty of change can only be overcome by holding our minds open to receive the rays of truth and changing our views and language and practice as often and as fast as we can obtain increasing knowledge.[544] The question then is, how can we - the Black Church and Black Bodies - continue this move in stepping further into decolonization?

One of the first steps that the Body of God can take toward the decolonization of the Black Church - the Holy Catholic Church[545] - is to parallel the prophetic theological imagination of our enslaved and oppressed ancestors. No theology is not nor has not been shaped by the context of

[543] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York, N.Y.: Grove Press, 2021), 36-37.

[544] Charles Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology*, ed. Anthony Uyl (Ontario, Canada: DEVOTED Publishing, 2018), 11.

[545] Justo L. González, *The Apostles' Creed for Today* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 76-77, 79. The Church is an essential part of the Creed because it is within the church, a communal space the Body of God universal can experience faith in the midst of varying theologies, traditions, and polities.

the Body of believers. In our indigenous land of Africa, our ancestors worshiped a thousand gods with a thousand names.[546] And, with the whitemalegod with which they were indoctrinated within AmeriKa, these oppressed Bodies took the partial knowledge by which their enslavers indoctrinated them - a Christianity that upheld a proslavery theology and considered them to be a different species of being - and used that doctrine denude of any form of justice for the poor and oppressed, to find a path towards liberation. These Bodies, whose very species were questioned, reshaped this embedded Puritan Christian tradition as they had a need to live into their inner divinity. Made by the oppressors' Royal Theological Imagination to be insignificant, as if smaller than a quark, and unrelatable to any system of being which could give meaning and direction to the individual oppressed Body and the communal oppressed Body, these Bodies had to step deep into their prophetic theological imagination. This was done by holding liberative secret and invisible spiritual services that embraced Christianity in their own image, to satisfy their own spiritual practices and needs (See figure 23.). They took the Royal God, ancestors, a place to experience joy and peace and comfort.[547]

[546] Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2010), 153.

[547] Henry Louis Gates Jr, *The Black Church: This Is Our Story, This Is Our Song* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2021), 16, https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/lib/dtl/reader.action?docID=6463324&ppg=34.

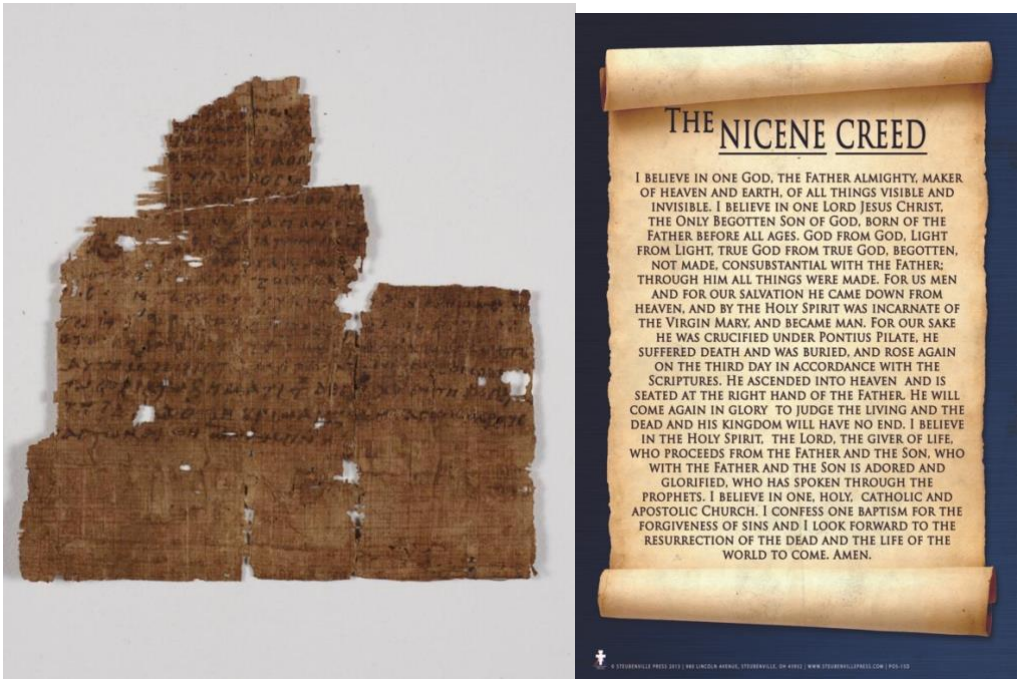
Figure 19 A Liberatory Christianity

Once again as a body, the Body of God must shift further from the ethic of salvation to an ethic of liberation. Jesus came to bring liberation to the othered and oppressed, and that is the mantle the Body of God it's called to embody. In stepping into his divinity, eighty- five percent of what Yeshua of Yehoshua - Jesus - taught was not in the Torah. Rather, in looking past the Torah as a means of experiencing increasing knowledge, Jesus used his own human experience and social context, as a member of the Outsider and Oppressed Body of God and his relationship with God to catechize and demonstrate his *agapē* ethic, a reimagined way of being.

The question Black Bodies and the Black Church individually and communally must ask themselves is: is our faith in alignment with the teachings of Yeshua of Yehoshua, Jesus the *Tektōn*, Jesus the Messiah? When considering the doctrine that has shaped our understanding of

Christianity, the institutionalization of the Jesus movement comes from a Constantinian call for proper Creedal language that could be used to establish one Christian doctrine. A tool which Constantine and the *Pax Romana* created to solidify, bolster, and proselytize their Royal Imagination. The Nicene Creed (See figure 24.), which is responsible for the establishment of

Figure 20 Nicene Creed


THE NICENE CREED
I BELIEVE IN ONE GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, OF ALL THINGS VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE. I BELIEVE IN ONE LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON OF GOD, BORN OF THE FATHER BEFORE ALL AGES. GOD FROM GOD, LIGHT FROM LIGHT, TRUE GOD FROM TRUE GOD, BEGOTTEN, NOT MADE, CONSUBSTANTIAL WITH THE FATHER; THROUGH HIM ALL THINGS WERE MADE. FOR US MEN AND FOR OUR SALVATION HE CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN, AND BY THE HOLY SPIRIT WAS INCARNATE OF THE VIRGIN MARY, AND BECAME MAN. FOR OUR SAKE HE WAS CRUCIFIED UNDER PONTIUS PILATE, HE SUFFERED DEATH AND WAS BURIED, AND ROSE AGAIN ON THE THIRD DAY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SCRIPTURES. HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN AND IS SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE FATHER. HE WILL COME AGAIN IN GLORY TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD AND HIS KINGDOM WILL HAVE NO END. I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE LORD, THE GIVER OF LIFE, WHO PROCEEDS FROM THE FATHER AND THE SON, WHO WITH THE FATHER AND THE SON IS ADORED AND GLORIFIED, WHO HAS SPOKEN THROUGH THE PROPHETS. I BELIEVE IN ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH. I CONFESS ONE BAPTISM FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS AND I LOOK FORWARD TO THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD AND THE LIFE OF THE WORLD TO COME. AMEN.

Yeshua of Yehoshua - Jesus of Nazareth - as Divine. The premise of Christian theology and doctrine, created over three hundred years after the time of Jesus' death by the very empire which persecuted the followers of "*the* Way," is a perverted take on the *agapē* ethic of the Jesus movement - the belief system lived out by Yeshua. Since the third century, most Christians have been indoctrinated with a God that is tied to the Royal Imagination: dominant, full of power, and far off from humanity - especially the oppressed and othered members of society. But the man Yeshua did not portray God in this way.

Throughout Jesus' life, as found in the Biblical narrative, Jesus was in relation with a God who, in the book of Genesis, played in the dirt, breathed into, and walked with their creation (Genesis 2: 7, 19, 21-22; 3:8 NRSV). This example left by Jesus, of God being relational, is a key anchor to which oppressed Bodies held onto in the past and can continue to keep holding onto. As the God of Jesus was relational, full of grace, and open to exploring a shared divinity with earthly Bodies, liberation from oppression could be found within the Body of God. After all, Yeshua, a preeminent example of the Most Divine of earth was an impoverished, destitute, and oppressed laborer. This is why the movement of The Way was about liberation of oppressed Bodies. After all, in one of Jesus' last meetings with the members of the Way, Jesus reminded them that they were in the same covenantal relationship with God as he himself was. In his prayer, Jesus reminded God, the present Body of God, and the Future Body of God, that they all have the same relational relationship

> As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us…. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them (John 17: 20-24 NRSV).

Thus, what the Black Church and oppressed Bodies of God must once again do in following the tenets of what Jesus teaches and practices by deconstructing what currently exists and reimagining a new way of being that more closely aligns with the *agapē* love ethic that Jesus demonstrated and experienced. The demonstration and embodiment of the kin-dom of God - heaven - brought down to earth. We are in the midst of a call to deconstruct and reconstruct a reimagined doctrine and theology of liberation out of the current knowledge and time we are in. We must start by asking questions about what we have been told and by asking what Jesus had

asked of those who wanted to be his disciples in the past: "What's written in God's Law? *How do you interpret it* (Luke 10:26 MSG)?" Let us begin with a critique of power because this is what Jesus had called us to do in order to move further into the ethic of *a Way*.[548] I believe that by further answering the question of how we interpret scripture as those called to continue the movement of "*a* Way;" this doctoral project can help the Black Church to tap into their theological imagination and return to the Gospel as lived by Jesus of Nazareth, therefore helping it to be decolonized.

Figure 21 Bible Riots of 1844

[548] First Corinthian Baptist Church, NYC, "Empowering Conversations: Christianity at the Crossroads," *www.youtube.com* (YouTube, 2022), last modified 2022, accessed October 31, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcAL4i10J7A&t=1s..

Chapter III: Research Questions

Introduction

Research Question #1

What is decolonization and what does it mean in terms of the black church?

Research Question #2

What does the deconstruction of a black church look like?

Research Question #3

What does the Black church look like in the 21st century (reconstruction/re-creation and reconciliation)?

Chapter IV: Plan of Implementation

Goal 1:

Create a communal space centered around theological and Post-Human thought that attempts to move Bodies towards Human wholeness through interpreting Holy texts and music through liberation theologies and process thought. I will be working with at least one of my site team members of the site team to establish a partnership with a physical location to host communal worship. Site team members will participate, as members of this community, during worship service. Additionally, they will also be asked to provide feedback, via questionnaire, on each worship service. There assistance will be crucial in assessing the potential for this new worship service to be a space which develops open communication within this newly formed community.

- ***Strategy 1*:** Create a YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram communities for Bodies to join and gather.
- ***Strategy 2*:** Organize and create a physical space of worship in partnership with a Church.
- ***Strategy 3*:** Prepare a sermon series that articulates and expresses the Most Divine as experienced in *agapē* love.
- ***Strategy 4*:** Create a social media post to be posted in Facebook community that promote decolonizing Self in the context of a Black Church.

Evaluation of Goal 1:

Community members and guest will be asked to complete a monthly questionnaire that allows them to offer feedback, critique, or suggestions. The community must grow based on its

occupants, therefore monitoring the growth of members will provide information that can be measured and evaluated.

Goal 2:

Create a podcast – Hip Hop and Theology – that invites Bodies to experience a relational God in Hip Hop music: A relational God who continually reveals God-Self in Hip Hop lyrics (Theo-Poetics) to humanity as gospel (good news) helping us to grow into a closer relationship with our-Selves and with God. Members of this site team will collaborate in the podcast by participating as thought partners throughout the sessions. They will also be asked to provide feedback, via questionnaire, on each episode based on the topic of the episode. There assistance will be crucial in assessing the potential for the podcast to be a space which develops open communication within this newly formed community.

- ***Strategy 1*:** Create a podcast using YouTube, TikTok, Instagram and Spotify. Later, as the community grows, the community will be transitioned to Mighty Networks, an online community holding hub.
- ***Strategy 2*:** Organize and create a guest list for the podcast.
- ***Strategy 3*:** Prepare exegesis research on selected Hip-Hop music.

Evaluation of Goal 2:

This will be one of the more difficult goals to evaluate. We will look at our relationship with our audience and identify the listener base. We will look to see if our listeners witness or experience the relational Divine while listening to the podcast. Additionally, we will look for acknowledgement by guests and the audience that the podcast is a safe space where these Bodies can listen, share, and ask questions, give suggestions, and bring their whole Self into each episode.

Goal 3:
Create an online course that invites people to experience a relational God: A God who continually reveals God-Self to humanity as we grow into a closer relationship with our-Selves and with God. I will be working members of my site team to help develop a short beta course that will hopefully be used as a template to develop a course suitable for the public. Site team members will participate, as members of this community, in the beta course. Additionally, site team members will also be asked to provide feedback, via questionnaire, on each class. There assistance will be crucial in assessing and implementing any necessary developments in the course.

- ***Strategy 1*:** Create a curriculum and rubric for a multi-faith course.
- ***Strategy 2*:** Set up an online course.
- ***Strategy 3*:** Implement the course.

Evaluation of Goal 3:

Students will be asked to complete a pre and post course questionnaire and complete a pre and post course quiz/test that allows the students to observe and compare their understanding of decolonization and re-creation of the Black Church prior to the course and after completing the course. A post course evaluation will offer the opportunity for students to share their personal feedback, critiques, and suggestions on their experience during the course.

Chapter V:

Ministerial Competences

The site-team for the "Jesus the Decolonizer of the Church" thesis consists of transformational leaders who have been engaged in social justice work both secularly and theologically. In the theistic arena all of my site team members have been engaged in a liberative theological education for those who are oppressed. Additionally, the members of this site-team all-walk differently - and yet in community - with the Most Divine and with their neighbors. Rev. James Perry, Senior Pastor of Mount Olivet Baptist Church of Peekskill, and the Vice President of Finance for a major publishing company, is a good friend and mentor whose vision is to edify the people of God, while transforming Christ's church through inclusivity and equity for the individual and the community. Simultaneously, James is the epitome of one who works to DO justice, LOVE mercy, and WALK humbly with your God in his everyday life making time to actively participate in many Social Justice organizations. Rev. Rafael Reyes III, PhD, is currently the Director of Graduate Student Life and Community Engagement at the Katz School of Yeshiva University. I have worked alongside Dr. Reyes as his Student, as his Teacher Assistant, and helped countless students with their writing alongside him as a volunteer writing coach. Throughout our mutual spiritual journey, Dr. Reyes has pushed me to further open and exercise my prophetic theological imagination as a means of stepping into my wholeSelf through a life process of reimagining meanings and symbols. The altruistic Rev. Peter Heltzel, PhD, is a prolific author, the Director of the Micah Institute, and the former Associate Professor of Theology at NYTS. Additionally, Rev. Heltzel serves on the Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation Team. Since my first meeting with Dr. Heltzel, he has pushed me to grow in my theological

thinking and understanding, as I was his research assistant and TA for the greater part of my time at NYTS. Longtime friend, Rev. Shanea Leonard, is a justice warrior, who is currently the Associate for Gender & Racial Justice for the Presbyterian Church. They are also a pastor, teacher, consultant, author, and community activist. Rev. Leonard has been and continues to help bring the concerns of intersectionality to the forefront of theological conversation. As a Pastor, they have been recognized for their extensive presence in the social justice, and reproductive justice movements. Leonard believes that God has given them a burden for people whom others have disregarded, oppressed, forgotten, or simply don't even see. They too believe that it is a mandate for every believer to DO justice, LOVE mercy, and WALK humbly with God. Rev. Dr. Valerie Holly is and has been a social justice advocate working for those who are marginalized, othered, oppressed, and left with no voice. Both as a social worker and as a minister, Holly has worked to connect individuals from all walks of life to an affirming and welcoming God that creates opportunities for us to learn how important we are to God and to each other. Dr. Marie-Yola Dautruche, my mother, is a scientist, an educator, and also holds a Doctorates in theology. She has been open, and even studied many aspects of various spiritual traditions, and I believe she will be a great asset on this site team.

NYTS Multi-faith Ministerial Competency Assessment Instrument

Below you will find a list of qualifying words used to qualify the multi-faith ministerial competencies in each of the several areas that are outlined in the following pages. The Site Team as a whole, in dialogue with a multi-faith minister, is to engage in an assessment of each competency that ends with assigning a qualifying word to each. Where possible, specific examples should be given to illustrate the response. The multi-faith minister should be a full participant in this competency assessment.

Key to the Meaning of Qualifying Words

"Continue"

This is a competency that this person shows strength in but needs to hone and smooth in order to develop further or excel.

"Develop"

This is a competency that this person already excels or rates as highly satisfactory in performance.

"Attention"

This points to an area where special attention is needed, especially in light of a particular ministry in which the person is engaged. It may be that the person was never provided an opportunity to develop competency, but it could also be that a personal characteristic (mood, temperament, commitment, or problem) interferes with the development and execution of the competency.

Assessment of Multi-Faith Candidate Competency

1. **Knowledge and appreciation of one's own faith tradition**

A multi-faith minister must be knowledgeable about his or her own faith tradition, capable of interpreting it accurately in a wider multi-faith context, and able to encourage others within the tradition to grow in faith and understanding.

Continue (3) Develop (2) Attention (0) Start (0) Skip (0) N/A (0)

Joël and his site team have pondered and discussed that as a multifaith minister Joël has proven himself to be foundationally strong, both in dialog and writing, in his own faith tradition. His faith tradition is in black liberative theologies, coupled with a strong sense of community. This community extends to LGBTQIA+ communities and more open interpretations of Christian faith. Joël has also interestingly started engaging in the post-colonial perspective. Yet, the site team, as a whole, believes that a deeper dive in his journey will yield an even more abundant understanding and appreciation of his faith tradition which will allow him to encourage others within a wider multifaith context, and within the Christian tradition to grow in faith and understanding.

2. Knowledge and appreciation of the values of other faith traditions

A multi-faith minister must also be knowledgeable and show appreciation for faith traditions that are not his or her own. She or he must be capable of demonstrating how an appreciation of the other in particular is grounded in one's own faith tradition, capable of hearing and responding to the value of faith traditions of others, and able to encourage others to grow within a wider multi-faith context.

Continue (3) Develop (2) Attention (0) Start (0) Skip (0) N/A (0)

Joël and his site team agree that as a multifaith minister, Joël demonstrates a healthy respect for the tradition of others with great genuineness. However, he must become more knowledgeable and show greater appreciation for faith traditions that are not his own. Joël is aware of

contextualized theologies - in the sense of diverse theologies within the Christian faith - more so than different religious traditions. However, there is a need for Joël to further work on connecting, in some way, with other faith perspectives in his work. Perhaps further reading into postcolonial deconstruction of hermeneutics may be enough to learn from other religious traditions concerning postcolonial work in the space of hermeneutics while developing Joël's own work. Additionally, with his work in expanding his appreciation for other faith traditions, Joël should further his capability of demonstrating how an understanding and appreciation of other religious traditions are grounded in his own faith tradition.

3. Ability to engage productively in dialogue

Ministry in a multifaith context necessarily requires an ability to engage in dialogue with other faith traditions, and with those who hold different faith commitments. Dialogue requires openness to the other and ability to respond honestly in a way that creates a sense of community that transcends the differences. Dialogue does not necessarily have as its objective removal or erasure of boundaries between traditions, but it does entail border crossing. The goal of dialogue is not necessarily agreement, but greater understanding on the side of all involved.

Continue (4) Develop (1) Attention (0) Start (0) Skip (0) N/A (0)

Joël and his site team recognize that the ability to engage in productive dialogue with other faith traditions is indispensable in a multifaith context and with those who hold different faith commitments. Additionally, when participating in this type of dialogue, it is vital to be fully transparent and fully open, and when necessary, responding honestly in a way that creates a sense of community that transcends the differences - and not necessarily the boundaries - found within the multifaith setting. In this setting Joël can enter and/or facilitate conversations, asking

questions that lead to “border-crossing.” He is an avid listener and can understand those he engages with.

4. Ability to interpret sacred texts

Using appropriate language, with sensitivity to the texts and identities of others, and demonstrating effectiveness in communicating one’s ideas, an interpreter of sacred texts presents researched, organized, well-prepared, sermons or other similar forms of proclamation that are relevant and challenging to the listener’s life and spiritual development.

Continue (4) Develop (1) Attention (0) Start (0) Skip (0) N/A (0)

Joël and his site team resolutely believe that within the context of Christianity, Joël exhibits a master of the Bible as a sacred text, no question. His sermons, scholarly works, and podcasts are well-researched, organized, and well-prepared. However, the site team still believes that Joël can spend more time engaged in and learning from other sacred texts from other religious traditions.

5. Ability as worship leader

While worship is rarely, if ever, multifaith in character, it is often conducted in a multifaith context. A worship leader who is sensitive to multifaith realities is responsible for conducting structured or formal aspects of worship – its sacraments or ordinances, its variety of rites, its arts of worship – with sensitivity to differences. The leader presents the sacraments or ordinances as a living sign of the presence of the holy, with meaningful confession, prayer and praise as appropriate. But he or she cannot assume that these symbols are directed only toward the members of one’s own faith community. He or she must be able to plan and lead worship services that reflect an awareness and active engagement with other’s traditions and commitments of the diverse faith communities.

Continue (2) Develop (1) Attention (1) Start (0) Skip (1) N/A (0)

Joël, as he has discussed with his site team, is very interested in developing an environment that works towards spiritual understanding. Joël has always pursued the aforementioned qualities, yet there is space for Joël to further develop as a worship leader - continuing to be sensitive to multifaith realities - as that term has different meanings in different contexts. He has had a limited opportunity to be a worship leader within the context of the Black Church and in diverse faith communities.

6. **Facilitating transformation**

Prophecy in the Hebrew Scriptural tradition is more than a matter of ecstatic speech uttered through the power of the Spirit (although it is this), and much more than merely telling the future (although it certainly has a strong eschatological dimension). A prophet is one who does not "foretell" so much as "forth-tell" the truth, doing so in such a way as to communicate the divine or transcendent passion for love and justice. As a prophet, a multifaith minister speaks the truth in love, communicates an awareness of social injustices, and sensitizes others to spiritual and ethical implications of various structures and practices in the church/synagogue/mosque/religious community, and in the wider society.

Continue (3) Develop (2) Attention (0) Start (0) Skip (0) N/A (0)

With a thesis topic on decolonization and reconciliation, Joël and his site team have talked about how this thesis is a prophetic work. In this prophetic, Joël has to go beyond prophetic in his writing and speaking. So the space of facilitating transformation is one in which Joël must continue to develop so that he can work towards communicating a united whole, to get others to go beyond their own thinking to a more unified thinking requires further development of his discussion skills and reasoning.

7. **Ability as multifaith leader**

A leader is one who creates an environment in which a variety of gifts may flourish. She or he is effective in empowering others to realize their own calling or gifts and facilitates opportunities in which others can flourish. Such a person is characterized by a willingness to listen and respond, the capacity to take the initiative when appropriate, the ability to delegate responsibility to capable people, and the sensitivity to share resources.

Continue (3) Develop (3) Attention (0) Start (0) Skip (0) N/A (0)

Joël and his site team hold that a Multifaith leader is one characterized by a willingness to listen and respond, the capacity to take the initiative when appropriate, and the ability to delegate responsibility to capable people, thereby creating an environment in which a variety of gifts may flourish. While Joël holds and provides the space for others to excel and use their gifts and talents, Joël can continue to develop a greater understanding of other faiths.

8. **Ability to serve as a multifaith religious educator**

A religious educator challenges the hearer to discover new resources within her or himself and others. He or she invites others to a new and more spiritually enlightened consciousness about self and society. With creativity and courage, he or she prompts us to ask new questions and work toward healing, reconciliation and justice. Such a challenge elicits personal growth in the gifts of the Spirit, which in turn overflow into the life of the community.

Continue (4) Develop (1) Attention (0) Start (0) Skip (0) N/A (0)

Joël and his site team have long discussed Joël's calling to be in religious education, and they call it his sweet spot and a space where Joël can flourish. His ability to ask questions and work toward healing, along with his curiosity and values, allow different perspectives to arise.

9. **Ability as counselor in a multifaith context**

Counseling is concerned with the work of healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling. In performing these tasks, the counselor has the privilege of walking with others on their inner journey toward wholeness. The effectiveness of any form of counseling is always contingent on the pastor, rabbi or other religious leader. Whatever model or theory one chooses to guide one's practice, it is imperative that the counselor be capable of establishing creative relationships that can help others become more whole. To the degree that the counselor is open, genuine, free, self-accepting and growing, she or he will foster these qualities in others.

Continue (3) Develop (1) Attention (0) Start (1) Skip (0) N/A (0)

Joël and his site team recognize that while he fosters the qualities of empathy, openness, freedom, and self-acceptance, along with his knowledge of vast amounts of material have started to prepare him for this work - especially in the post-colonial black theology arena. However, this is a competency that Joël must continue to develop in his inner journey towards wholeness so that he can journey with others towards their journey towards wholeness.

10. Spiritual Leader

Ministers are spiritual leaders of a community. As such, they are expected to be able to communicate effectively to others spiritual awareness and power. To do so, however, they must first be themselves grounded in spiritual disciplines and regularly exercising personal spiritual practices.

Continue (3) Develop (3) Attention (0) Start (0) Skip (0) N/A (0)

Joël and his site team know that ministers are spiritual leaders and learners of the community. As such, Joël's strong spiritual discipline, intuitiveness, and understanding will guide him as he continues to develop as he grows in discernment, wisdom, and confidence in the journey of spiritual leadership.

11. Witness

Various religious traditions understand the role of ministry beyond the borders of their community differently, but one of the common ways this is understood is through the symbol or practice of bearing witness. In bearing witness in both word and deed, a minister often extends the fundamental message of faith beyond the immediate boundaries of his or her own immediate religious community. Such activities need to be judged as to whether they are good news not just by those who are the insiders of a particular faith tradition, but by those who are on the outside as well. When carried out effectively, the witness that is made is truly experienced as life-giving by all who give it and receive it.

Continue (5) Develop (0) Attention (0) Start (0) Skip (0) N/A (0)

Joël and his site team agree that Joël comprehends that one of the common and preferred ways of being in community is through the practice of bearing witness. As such, Joël's site team notes that this is one of the competencies that Joël does well in. He is known as one who intently listens and affirms people as they are, a person unwavering in his witness. Thus, Joël will continue to bear witness to the multitude of the faith community in both word and deed, extending the liberative and reconciliatory message of *agapē* love.

12. Administrator

Administration is virtually a universal religious practice. An administrator is able to define and analyze a task or problem succinctly and clearly, establish concrete and realistic goals, develop strategies which flow out of these goals and initiate a clear, on- going process of evaluation. She or he communicates a sense of mission which sees each task as part of the whole life of the congregation and establishes a collegial environment in which the gifts of others are expressed. Through it all, there is precision, accuracy, organization and purpose. One senses that time is

well spent, that efforts are not duplicated, and that efficiency is balanced against other competing factors.

Continue (3) Develop (2) Attention (0) Start (0) Skip (1) N/A (0)

Joël and his site team have discussed the need for him to expand his ability to define and analyze a task succinctly and clearly, to establish realistic goals, along with strategies of implementation, in order to be a better administrator. However, there have been in the workplace, in school, and in his personal life where Joël's administration skills have been demonstrated.

13. Organizer

A community organizer is more than someone who can create the grounds for social change. A community organizer is one who learns the community, and helps the community come to know itself. Organizing is a task that everyone in ministry must engage in some way. Multifaith community organizing entails a special ability to organize not within but across religious boundaries in ways that crosses them responsibly while empowering people to work together for change that will bring a greater measure of common good.

Continue (0) Develop (5) Attention (0) Start (0) Skip (0) N/A (0)

Joël and his site team agree that he must develop his ability to organize across religious boundaries in ways that empower people. Being an organizer is a space of continuous development.

14. Professional

The professionalization of ministry is sometimes lamented but understood properly the minister as professional is one who realizes excellence in his or her calling. Among the skills that undergird the performance of ministry, those of the professional cannot be discounted.

Continue (5) Develop (0) Attention (0) Start (0) Skip (0) N/A (0)

As noted by his site team, Joël has journeyed in a professional manner through his academic work, research, questions, and faithfulness to the task of the church.

Strategies:

Knowledge and appreciation of one's own faith tradition

As one journeying towards becoming a multifaith minister and as a Body rooted in the importance of theological education, the primary competency to develop was the deeper interrogation of my faith traditions. As one who has become a multi-denominational and multi-cultural churched Body, to journey further into my wholeness, I must journey both the breadth and the width of my spiritual and theological anchorage.

Strategies: I will develop and schedule 10 hours a week dedicated to mediation, prayer, and studying sacred texts - focusing on *agapē* love and loving neighbor as yourself.

Strategies: I have enrolled and participated in two courses (*Cultural Somatics and Somatic Abolitionism*) with author and psychotherapist Resmaa Menakem which will focus on the effects of trauma on the human Body.

Ability to serve as a multifaith religious educator

I, as well as most of my site team, have known of my calling and my passion of becoming a theological educator since my first semester of my MDiv. As such I chose this competency because I want to educate Bodies with a multifaith purview. I believe that this competency will help to achieve this goal.

Strategies: I will set aside 10 hours a week to will delve into the holy writings, and the scholarly works of the religious bodies within a multifaith community.

Strategies: I will implement what I have learned immediately throughout my goals during and beyond this next year of project research and implementation.

Strategies: I will develop a curriculum for proposed courses on the Decolonization of the Black Church.

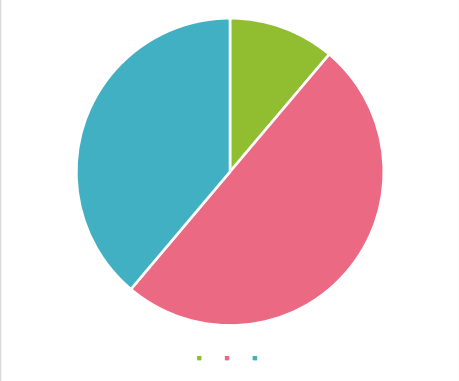
Facilitating transformation:

I chose this competency as the whole thought behind my thesis and project is to facilitate a reconciliatory transformation within the Black Church. In order to move prophetically, as an agitator working towards transformation by communicating a divine transcendence for love and justice. I must emBody my own "Knowledge and appreciation of my own faith tradition," which must undoubtedly include my beliefs and practices as a Black Christian in the Black Church. Secondly, must emBody my own "ability to serve as a religious educator," as I journey towards ever-becoming a multifaith

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Budget

Clean Pain Project Budget



Summary

Total Monthly Income
$250
Total Monthly Expenses
$1,120
Total Monthly Expenses
$870

Monthly Donations

Item	Amount
Online Fundraiser	$50.00
Project Merchandise	$100.00
Other	$100.00
Faith	$869.50

Monthly Expenses

Item	Amount
Survey Monkey	$0.00
Zoom	$100.00
Amazon Prime Subscription	$15.00
Evernote Subscription	$15.00
Soularize Multi-Faith Training (9 months)	$477.00
Guest Compensation	$50.00
Project Merchandise	$100.00
Social Media Marketing	$125.00
Consultant	$50.00
Marketing (US google algorythm)	$150.00
Travelling	$100.00

Appendix B: Timeline

	Completed NLT	Bold words represent ideas & Sub-Projects
☐	Nov 28 2021	A working **Challenge Statement** draft.
☐	Dec 30 2021	Recruit **Site-Team**
☐	Jan 1 2021	1st Meeting with **Site-Team**
☐	Feb 15 2022	1st draft of **Chapter One**
☐	Feb 15 2022	**Creating Research** Questions
☐	Mar 31 2022	1st draft of **Chapter Two.**
☐	April 30 2022	1st draft of **Chapter Three.**
☐	May 29 2022	1st draft of **Chapter Four.**
☐	Nov 25 2022	1st draft of **Chapter Five.**
☐	Jun 1 2022	**Interviews & Surveys** Begin**.**
☐	Jun 1 2022	**Start attending Trainings/Courses/Lectures/Seminars/Conferences.**
☐	Jul 15 2022	**Begin Building Courses/Lectures/Spaces.**
☐	Nov 15 2022	Final draft of **Proposal**
☐	Nov 27 2022	**Research** is focused & Analyzed.
☐	July 31 2022	**Research** is concluded & Analyzed. (8 months of research)
☐	Jan 01 2024	1st draft of **Dissertation**
☐	Mar 15 2024	Final draft of **Dissertation**

Appendix C: Definitions

Agapē Love: (Ancient Greek ἀγάπη, agapē) is a Greco-Christian term referring to unconditional love, "the highest form of love, charity" and "the love of God for man and of man for God."

A Living Symbol: A truly living symbol compels unconscious participation, and has a life-giving, and life-enhancing effect. So long as a symbol is a living thing, it is an expression for something that cannot be characterized in any other or better way. (Griffin, David Ray. Archetypal Process. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1989. 78.)

Altruism: An approach that suggests that actions are moral if their primary purpose is to promote the best interests of others. (Northouse, Peter Guy. Leadership: Theory and Practice. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2022. 427.)

Amerika: the fascist, oppressive or racist aspect of American society.

A Relational God: A God that exists in the past, present, and future: an eternal God: a process of relevant, restorative, and revolutionary relationship anchored in the present.

Authentic Leadership: focuses on whether leadership is genuine and "real." Rather than as a fixed trait, authentic leadership which can be developed or nurtured in a leader, expands in Bodies over a lifetime. Authentic leadership can also be defined as a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development. (Northouse, Peter Guy. Leadership: Theory and Practice. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2022. 221-222; Walumbwa, Fred O., Bruce J. Avolio, William L. Gardner, Tara S. Wernsing, and Suzanne J. Peterson. "Authentic Leadership: Development and Validation of a Theory-Based Measure†." Journal of Management 34, no. 1 (2007). 94.)

Black: an experience that has a person exist in a system of racism, a life of humiliation and suffering. The symbolization of oppression and liberation in any society; a condition of a people who have as a mark of identification a color; a movement of this people, presently without consistent cohesion, to a state of consistent cohesion within their historical setting. Blackness symbolizes oppression and liberation in any society. (James H. Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation. (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1970), 12; William Augustus Jones, Jr. God in the Ghetto (Elgin, IL: Progressive Baptist Publishing House, 1979), back cover.)

Caucasian: A family of lifesystems who inhabited the Caucasus Mountains between the continents of Asia and Europe or poses ancestry who originate from Caucasus Mountains.

Christianity: a faith tradition stemming from the life, teachings, and death of Jesus of Nazareth (The Anointed One of God).

Church: A symbolic body of practitioners who believe to be following Christ. As a Christian, Church doctrine is believed to be Gods absolute command and words.

Colonizer: A thinking pattern; a community of Bodies who desire to control and conquer other lifesystems. An effect of an ancient trauma that is perpetuated by illusions of power and absolute safety.

Community: An interconnected relational network of Bodies who are governed by a phenomenon described as God or Creator.

Conceptual Reversion: The mental grasping of eternal objects that are not yet physically realized in the temporal world, but which are proximately relevant to, and hence compatible for synthesis with, those that are already physically realized. "Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited, whereas imagination embraces the entire world, stimulating progress, giving birth to evolution. It is, strictly speaking, a real factor in scientific research." (Oleg Komlik, Albert Einstein on the Power of Ideas and Imagination in Science, Economic Sociology and Political Economy, July 31, 2019, https://economicsociology.org/2016/01/08/albert-einstein-on-the-power-of-ideas-and-imagination-in-science/.)

Consciousness: A relationship between a series of patterns of thinking. An inter-dimensional community of thoughts and emotions.

Courage: the ability to articulate one's position while considering other perspectives. The aptitude to express convictions involves risk yet fosters opportunities for meaningful dialog. Responding to objections entails tenacity but should not be confused with close-mindedness.

Creation: God created or called all things into being ("Om" is the primordial sound of the universe).

Dehumanize: to deprive Bodies of human qualities, personality, or dignity; the denial of full humanness in others and the cruelty and suffering that accompanies it. Disadvantaged: lacking in the basic resources or conditions (such as standard housing, medical and educational facilities, and civil rights) believed to be necessary for an equal position in society, especially with regards to financial or social opportunities and advantages.

Disenfranchised: deprived of some right, privilege, or immunity

Ekklesia: is a called out community or group of Bodies gathered at a public place of council who are governed by a phenomenon described as God. For the Greeks the ἐκκλησία was a legislature where all classes of people came to participate.

Empathy: the ability to sense or identify with other Body's emotions, coupled with the ability to imagine what other Bodies might be thinking or feeling; the ability to attempt to discovering the other through the Self.
Energy: [physics] the capacity for doing work. It may exist in potential, kinetic, thermal, electrical, chemical, nuclear, or other various forms. There are, moreover, heat and work—i.e., energy in the process of transfer from one body to another. $E = mc^2$ is a scientific symbol that expresses how energy is created. Mass (M) symbolizes movement or action, while the speed of Light (C) symbolizes Divine thought or ideals. The energy produced from this alchemy

symbolizes potential change, imagination, or experience. When action merges with ideals, we witness experience; the manifestation of the Original Source (God) within time. (Einstein, Albert, and Robert W. Lawson. Relativity: The Special and General Theory. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001.)

Epistemological: The theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope, Epistemology is the investigation of what distinguishes justified belief from opinion. [online Dictionary]

Equality: the state of being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities.

Ethics: has its roots in the Greek word ethos, which translates to "customs," "conduct," or "character." Ethics is concerned with the kinds of values and morals an individual or a society finds desirable or appropriate. (Northouse, Peter Guy. Leadership: Theory and Practice. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2022. 423.)

Gnosticism: taught that salvation is achieved through hidden knowledge (gnosis). This knowledge usually dealt with the individual's relationship to the transcendent being (God). It denies the incarnation of God as the Son. Gnostic doctrine teaches that the world was created and ruled by a lesser divinity, the demiurge, and that the Christ was an emissary of the remote supreme divine being, esoteric knowledge (gnosis) of whom enabled the redemption of the human spirit.

Hopefulness: The receptivity to the future possibilities of God. The cultivation of thankfulness for our heritages and expectation for our future ministries engenders a guard against cynicism and a spirit of perseverance during times of stress and disorientation.

Humility: The capacity to recognize reliable sources of informed judgment while recognizing the limits of our knowledge and the fallibility of our judgments.

Hypostasis: the distinguishing element in God, the concrete, intellectual individuality, existing in itself.

Imagination: Imagination (Whitehead) - (Conceptual Reversion)-To think otherwise than the fact (presented evidence)- to think freely- free thought. the manifestation of thought. Imagination cannot be coercive (power), instead it is persuasive (relational). The imagination's aim is to help define things

Imago Christi: Latin for the image of Christ; the imitation of Yeshua helps Bodies experience the agape love of God; God's own self-actualization through and care for humankind.

Imago Dei: Latin for the image of God; God's own self-actualization through and care for humankind; a theological doctrine common to Abrahamic traditions that denotes humankind's symbolical relation to God as the very image of God as human nature allows God to be made manifest in human Bodies.

Imitatio Christi: Latin for the imitation of Christ; the attempt to live and act as Yeshua lived and acted.

Imitatio Dei: Latin for imitation of God; the edict that Bodies imitate the ways of God by imitating the Divine attributes of showing and extending agape love to other Bodies.

Immanence: The immanence of God refers to The Most Divine's relationship to the world – that God actively operates within it, sustains it as its effective cause, and is continually present (i.e. omnipresent).

Indecent: A process founded on opposite grounds. An Indecent Theology will always come from the margins of imprecision, and mismatches. (Marcella Althaus-Reid, Indecent Theology Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics (London U.K.: Routledge, 2010), 64)

Justice: just behavior or treatment, fairness. The virtue which consists in giving to everyone what is his/her due, practical conformity to the laws and principles of rectitude in the dealings of humanity with one another.

Koinonia: sharing, joint participation, and partnership.

Laicity: the mutual fellowship of believers - refers to the value of the human in relationship within the church, founded on grace anthropology.

Liberation: The act or process of freeing a lifesystem or Body from the control and or enslavement of absolute past ideas of power.

Lifesystem: [a living thing] Inclusive of a variety of religious, and faith traditions, as well as mystical, and metaphysical belief system. (Harris, Melanie L. Ecowomanism: African American Women and Earth-Honoring Faiths. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017. 112.)

Light: Organic chaotic information that is also an energy source. Light is a kind of wave that carries energy from one space to another space. Light can move throughout empty space (unlike sound waves). Light waves are made of a mixture of electricity and magnetism, so they are called electromagnetic waves. Light moves about 186,000 miles (300,000kilometers) per second. This means a beam of light could go 7.5 times around the world in one second.

Meta: A prefix meaning "transcending."

Metamodernism: A structure of feeling that emerges from and reacts to the postmodern as much as it is a cultural logic that corresponds to today's stage of global capitalism. (Robin Van Den Akker, Alison Gibbons, and Timotheus Vermeulen, eds., Metamodernism - Historicity, Affect, and Depth after Postmodernism. New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017, 5.)

Meta-Spirituality: An emotionally intelligent & inclusive consciousness (a way of thinking & being) that is between religion and spirituality emerging from a 21st century "meaning crisis:" millennials migrating from religion in the U.S.

Mutual Immanence: We are affected by God just as much as God is affected by us in the past, present, and future. God, and the world also remain mutually transcendent such that any world happening owes it to its existence its own actualization as its own decision of unification of its relationality. (Alfred North Whitehead, et al., Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology (New York: Free Press, 1985), 348; Andrew M Davis, Mind, Value, and Cosmos. On the Relational Nature of Ultimacy (Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Publ, 2021), 199.)

Ontological: relating to the branch of metaphysics dealing with the nature of being.

Openness: the desire to engage in open-ended search for knowledge of God, including receptivity to different ideas, experiences, and people. Listening becomes a discipline that acknowledges the other and respects diversity. The art of being a student and a teacher is an ongoing process that necessitates hospitality patience and love.

Oppressed: burdened by the unjust or cruel abuse of power or authority; mental pressure or distress.

Othered: a view by which a person or a group is treated as intrinsically different to others within a set social group: a phenomenon which negates a person or group from their humanity.

Peace: a state of quiet or tranquility; freedom from disturbance or agitation; freedom from war or internal commotion; that quiet, order and security which is guaranteed by the laws.

Phenomenology: The aim of Phenomenology is to clarify describe and make sense of the structures and dynamics of pre-reflective human experiences, were as hermeneutics aims to articulate the reflective character of the human experience as it manifests in languages and forms of creative signs. (Oxford Handbooks online Rene' Rosfort mar 2019)

Power: the capacity of some persons to produce intended, and foreseen effects on others. (Dennis Hume Wrong, Power, Its Forms, Bases, and Uses (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 2.)

Prayerfulness: the making of space to commune with God. The tack of learning and teaching so that we are formed into the image of Christ through the Spirit involves our consistent reliance on God's sanctifying work.

Pre-history: the history of human culture before written records or human documentation.

Privilege: a right, immunity, or benefit enjoyed by a particular person or a restricted group of people beyond the advantages of most.

Privileged: abounding in not only the basic but also the superfluous resources and conditions (such as housing, medical and educational facilities, and civil rights) believed to be necessary for an equal position in society, especially with regards to financial or social opportunities and advantages.

Pluralism: Religious pluralism is not simply the sociological fact that there are many different religions. A religious pluralist is to make two assertions. First, these Bodies reject any claim that their own religion is the only true or valid religious tradition. Second, the Bodies are open in principle, in other words, to the possibility that other religions are also be valid, thus legitimizing all belief systems as unique but equally viable approaches to a shared end goal.

Prophetic Ministry: The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us. - to hold together criticism and energizing, for I should urge that either by itself is not faithful to our best tradition. (Walter Brueggemann, The Practice of Prophetic Imagination (Seoul: Scripture Union Press, 2017), 3-4.)

Public: done, perceived, or existing in open view; a place accessible or visible to all.

Queer: Whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. (Lisa Isherwood and Marcella Althaus-Reid, Trans/Formations (London: SCM Press, 2009), 17.)

Racism: prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior, the belief that all members of each race possess characteristics or abilities specific to that race, especially to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or races.

Reconciliation: The end of the estrangement, caused by choices perceived as evil, between God and human Bodies; the peace between human Bodies and God that results from the expiation of religious sin and the propitiation of God's wrath involving a change in the relationship between God and humanity or Human Bodies and other Human Bodies.

Relational Transparency: Refers to being open and honest in presenting one's true self to others. -Relational transparency occurs when individuals share their core feeling, motives and inclinations with others in an appropriate manner. (Peter Guy Northouse, Leadership: Theory and Practice (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2022), 229.)

Right: Conformity to the will of God or to his law, the perfect standard of truth and justice; a power, privilege, moral or legal claim which correctly belongs to a person by law, by nature, or by tradition, to correct a wrong; to restore to normal or correct condition.

Seeker: A seeker is a Body or lifesystem searching and journeying for Source.

Self: The archetypal Self, as we have noted, is not the center of the field of consciousness (not the ego) but is a deeper organizing principle to which ego-consciousness must become related. (C. Michael Smith, Jung and Shamanism in Dialogue: Retrieving the Soul, Retrieving the Sacred (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), 120.)

Shadow: The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets with

considerable resistance. Indeed, self-knowledge as a psychotherapeutic measure frequently requires much painstaking work extending over a long period. (C. G. Jung and Joseph Campbell, The Portable Jung (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 145.)

Shaman: Mircea Eliade defines a Shaman as "a magician, and medicine man; he/she is believed to cure, like all doctors, and to perform miracles of the fakir type, like all magicians, whether primitive or modern." [a technician of Spirit] Don Jose Ruiz a Toltec Shaman from Southern Central Mexico defines a Shaman as a "nagual," meaning the awakened ones, in Nahuatl language. -Nagual or Shaman symbolize "the life force energy, the divinity that we all have inside of us-the Shamans are the ones whose eyes are open to this realization. A Shaman can be anyone who has experienced an inner awakening causing their third eye (spiritual eye) to open and see their relationship with Creation in a different way: realizing that the original Source/God is Us (God within). The Shaman is a human being who is able to communicate with the dead, demons, and nature spirits, [energy] without thereby becoming their instrument. [vessel] (Ruiz, Jose. Wisdom of the Shamans: What the Ancient Masters Can Teach Us about Love and Life. San Antonio, TX: Hierophant Publishing, 2019. XII; Eliade, Mircea. Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004. 4; Smith, C. Michael. Jung and Shamanism in Dialogue: Retrieving the Soul, Retrieving the Sacred (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), 12.)

Spirit: Life giving, and death evoking energy. [evoke: bring or recall to the conscious mind. (present)] Energy.

Symbolism: Symbolism is no mere idle fancy or corrupt degeneration; it is inherent in the very texture of human life. Language itself is a symbolism. (Alfred North Whitehead, Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect)

Theology: The first half of theology is "theo," which means God in Greek. The suffix -ology means the study of, so theology literally means the study of God, we usually expand it to mean the study of religious faith, practice, and the study of God's relation to the world.
Theo-Poetry: Poetry focused on expressing a temporary image of God.

Transcendence: A theological term that, when referring to the Christian's perspective of God, states that God is outside of the universe and is independent of it and its properties. God is other, independent, and different from God's creations, beyond it and not limited by creation or to creation.

Transformational Leadership: is a process that changes and transforms people. It is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals. It includes accessing followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them. It is a process that often incorporates charismatic and visionary leadership. (Northouse, Peter Guy. Leadership: Theory and Practice. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2022. 185.)

Umvelinqangi: Divine Consciousness or the inner light of creation.

Unwabu: the chameleon

White Body Privilege: the societal privilege that benefits white Bodies over non-white Bodies, particularly if they are otherwise under the same social, political, or economic circumstances.

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Appendix B: Clean Pain Sermon Series

SERMON 1: Enjoy "Sabbathing:" Rest is Holy

Hebrews 4: 1-11 MSG - it's in the bulletin - For as long, then, as that promise of resting in God pulls us on to God's goal for us, we need to be careful that we're not disqualified (Gk: hustereó - coming *behind and therefore left out*). We received the same promises as those people in the wilderness, but the promises didn't do them a bit of good because they didn't receive the promises with faith. If we believe though, we'll experience that state of resting. But not if we don't have faith. *The only way that we can get to a place of rest is by having Faith. Faith that if we listen to God's call, we can reach a place of rest.* Remember that God said, Exasperated, I vowed, "They'll never get where they're going, never be able to sit down and rest." God made that vow, even though God finished *God's* part before the foundation of the world. Somewhere it's written, "God rested the seventh day, having completed their (I chose this gender neutral or inclusive adjective because God is a Spirit and therefore is ungendered) work," but in this other text God says, "They'll never be able to sit down and rest." So, this promise has not yet been fulfilled. Those earlier ones never did get to the place of rest because they were disobedient. God keeps renewing the promise and setting the date as *today*, just as God did in David's psalm, centuries later than the original invitation: Today, please listen, don't turn a deaf ear… and so this is still a live promise. It wasn't canceled at the time of Joshua; otherwise, God wouldn't keep renewing the appointment for "today." The promise of "arrival" and "rest" is still there for God's people. God is at rest. And at the end of the journey, we'll surely rest with God. So, let's keep at it and eventually arrive at the place of rest.

Poem: A Restless Bird - Aaron Waldron (MDiv graduate & DMin Student)
Rest taunts me like the little bird in my window.
Day after day I shoo away this little bird.
It sings in my ear as I systematically slave for absolute values.
It flies in circles around my house.
It stares at me as if it's inviting me to come play.
This little bird is restless with no off switch.
Eagerly Patient: waiting for me to acknowledge it.
Instead, I am angry, unknown to me.
With excitement and passion
I Kill the little bird in my window.
I no longer hear the songs or see it in my window.
I now weep with deep emptiness and restlessness.
Rest taunts me like the little bird in my window.
Day after day I shoo away this little bird.
The Bird stares at me as if it's inviting me to come play.
This little bird is restless with no off switch – *(Probably like most of us here today.)*
Eagerly Patient: waiting for me to acknowledge it.
With excitement and passion
I Kill the little bird in my window – *(calling me to rest.)*
I now weep with deep emptiness and restlessness.

GM. How many of you need rest? How many of you need rest this morning? -- Think about the Poem again - here are some of the things I highlighted… I'll get back to the question… I want to reframe the question I asked before reviewing Aaron's poem-- **how many of you** (**how many of Us**) are holding to the sabbath?

~ Psalm 46 → 2nd person… God speaking - "**Be still and know that I am God**!" … & "Step out of the traffic! Take a long, loving look at me, your High God, above politics, above everything (Psalm 46:10 MSG)." Jacob-wrestling God fights for us, God-of-Angel-Armies protects us.

~ **story about Res**t… I grew up churched… it's in the blood … **Formative years Catholic, COGIC, JW** - I didn't grow up knowing the many traditional Hymns that are sung at churches (at least not in English). Therefore, I had to search for hymns associated with the Theme of Rest for today's service. During my extensive search, what I found is that the concept of **rest** for the Church universal - despite what is prescribed in the Holy Scriptures & the texts that I just read - is **associated with death and funerals**. It seems like the church is telling us to wait till we die *or* wait till we get to heaven to rest DESPITE The Most Divine telling us to **rest or Sabbath WHILE WE'RE ALIVE**.

PAUL must've known what he was talking about in this exhortation to the Hebrews. I want to give you Just a little background about Paul & The Letter to the Hebrews… You already know that The Apostle Paul was one of the most prolific early Christian apologetics - a top defender of the Faith. Paul's stories and teachings - as well as those attributed to him - make up almost 1/3 of the canon of the New Testament. Thus, for many, Paul's significance within the New Testament - the Church - is second only to Jesus. To better understand the 5 Ws of the Pauline letters it is important to have some knowledge of the content & context of the man Paul, his writings & his exegesis of the other religious texts of his time.

LOOKS: We all know the adage "Don't Judge a book by its cover" because "looks" are important & It was no different for the Apostle Paul. An apocryphal text going back to the first century describes Paul as "bald-headed, bowlegged, strongly built, a man of dark complexion, small in size, with meeting eyebrows, with a rather large nose, full of grace, for at times he looked like a man and at times he had the face of an angel (Acts of Paul and Thecla 1:7)." Looks & his CULTURE framed Saul/Paul as he was born as a diaspora Jew to Jewish parents in the city of Tarsus, as a Roman citizen. Saul was educated under the philosopher & Rabbi Gamaliel as a philosopher.

WRITINGS: We all know of Saul's transformation narrative to Paul - it is this transformation, on the road to Damascus approx. 4-7 years after the crucifixion of Yeshua that further informed who Paul was theologically. It is from this mold that we know Paul whose "letters offer the only direct access to a **first-person** voice in the New Testament."

HEBREWS: this sermon - the letter to the Hebrews - (13:22 notes that this writing is an exhortation parallel to the use of the word sermon at the time) was written around 68AD, as a

Pseudo-Pauline text. It was included in Paul's texts because of an "old tradition in Alexandria," and Saint Augustine & Saint Jerome backing that Pauline tradition. Stylistically Hebrews differs in manner, diction, and theology from other Pauline texts.

Now, please raise your hand if you are a workaholic. Raise your hand if you're a do-aholic. Raise your hand if you are a killer of the bird of rest singing at your window. I Am a Workaholic, a killer of the divine bird of rest, and this sermon may be more for me than it is for you. Just in case you're unsure or you doubt your attachment to work - *including work in the church* - do you suffer from any of the following?

- In our fast-paced and wired world, with a never-ending access to our work - **Do you have trouble Disconnecting/Relaxing? Do you Dream about work?**
- As you spread yourself thin do you feel less productive physically, relationally, & *spiritually* - **almost like you're always behind?**
- Does your body suffer from - Exhaustion, Brain Fog; Stress; Mental and Physical Health Problems; Anxiety and Depression; Weight gain/loss; Insomnia… **Is your health declining?**
- **Can you literally count the hours -** a 50-, 60-, and even an 80+ hour workweek?
- Do you feel **distant** from friends and family?

Sadly, I have been in this state before - even this week - and I must be very careful not to slip into a routine - like the Israel of old - in which I do not get to walk into my sabbath. And maybe like me - when you're just doing too (3x) much you seek the Lord (or your Doctor, Therapist, Partner, Friend, Church leaders) and you ask - tell me what to do forgetting that **they all have already told** you/**me**/**us** what to do. The answer that they have all given and will continue to give us is that **we need to follow the Sabbath and keep it Holy.**
Now the literal meaning of Sabbath refers **to a day of rest from work and a time of spiritual worship**. The privileges we have under the gospel are greater than any had under the law of Moses… So, today I only want to focus on the Sabbath **stemming from the Greek** word "σαββατισμοσ/SABBATISMOS" **REST or REPOSE!!!**

The reason I am focusing on the Sabbath as a time of Rest is because My partner Maria and I have fallen prey to the system of overworking practiced, normalized, and celebrated in our culture. From my experience, it has been detrimental to **work** & not taking time to Sabbath/Rest.

Maria: is one who is Hard working, and excellent at her career, (1) Maria was one of the fundraisers for the National Museum of African American History (2) She became the youngest VP @ NUL; (3) She's the current Director of the Westchester Center for Racial Equity at the YWCA; & (4) She's is also the current manager of H.E.A.L. Together at Race Forward; (5) She has her own consulting firm; (6) She is also an awesome mother -- BUT in reaching these "great" achievements, she hasn't had enough time to Sabbath - for Self-Care & Rest. The result was falling into the 5 signs of overworking that I mentioned previously.

Joel: I am a workaholic, and not only did I fit, **and do** still fit into the 5 signs of overworking, the choice to not sabbath negatively affected my family. As a newly married individual, I put work before my wife and family… I often worked between 90 - 100+ hours weekly. **P.I.P.** (Performance Improvement Plan) … a choice **present & involved & I realized how much I**

was missing. How great it was to stop and Sabbath with Maria & Imena & Lou (my son) & Friends - *Indeed I had forgotten the importance of observing the Sabbath…* It's still a struggle for me as LAST week was a crazy week, I was in & may continue to be in way over my head with work… *Clearly, I* had forgotten and continue to forget - even in the midst of doing research/study/prayer for this sermon - the example and promise set by God and exemplified by Jesus regarding sabbathing.

- **God demonstrated & commanded how to sabbath**: Genesis 2 - "So on the seventh day, having finished their task, God ceased (**shabath**) from this work they had been doing, and God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy (Gen 2:2-3 TLB) " & then God proceeded to command humanity to "Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy (Gen 2:8)." --- Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all adhere to the belief that *at the dawn of human creation* God gave the command to **REST**. The Rest Day, the Rest week, the Rest Year, and the Rest Millenia - as found in the biblical narrative - were all designed to be kept Holy. "Sabbath, in the first instance, is not about worship. It is about **work stoppage**. It is about **withdrawal** from **The Royal Consciousness -** the anxiety filled system of Pharaoh - and the refusal to let one's life be defined by production and consumption and the endless pursuit of private well-being (Bruggeman)"
- ~ **Jesus** also observed and exemplified how to follow the Sabbath: in the 2nd chapter of the synoptic gospel of Mark (Mark being the original gospel text that the other Gospelers remixed to write their own Gospels from) Jesus told both the critics & followers of *his* time, *our* time, and *future* times -- that the "Sabbath observance was **not a duty** that humankind owed to God. Rather, God made the Sabbath {the Sabbath day, the Sabbath week, the Sabbath year, and the Sabbath millennia} as **a day of rest** for humankind's benefit (Mark 2:27)." In his lived life, Jesus kept the Sabbath and taught his Disciples to keep the Sabbath Holy. Why you may ask -- I'll quickly cover just 3 of the possibilities why they did this.

(1) because according to Lamentations Jesus, his Disciples, and we today - humanity, especially the oppressed/those with their backs against the wall - carry a yoke of labor around our necks, we are tired, and **we are given** no rest -- **we have to seek** and take rest (Lam 5:5).
(2) Jesus took time to Sabbath because he understood and embodied the advice he gave on the sermon of the Mount -- namely "stop being worried *or* **anxious (perpetually uneasy, distracted**) about your life... **God provides for** the little bird asking you to rest, the weeds, and for all the pagans. If God cares well for them, God will also care for you and I (Matt 6:25-34)."
(3) Jesus Sabbathed because he understood that "the beloved of the Lord dwells in safety by the HIGH GOD; shielded, covered, and dwelling between Their shoulders BECAUSE God promises to give us rest if we choose it by bringing Jesus, you and I into the "promised land" (Deut 33:12 & Ex 33:14).
Thus, **The Sabbath** was instituted to **renew our strength**! The Sabbath was instituted to **allow us to know peace** & get some relief from anxiety & worriment. The Sabbath was instituted to allow us to **experience Security in the presence of God**.

Like the nation of Israel, participating in the Sabbath today is an affirmation of our identity. Just as the people of the nation of Israel were literal slaves in Egypt and were brought out of the yoke

of slavery by God's mighty hand and an outstretched arm (Deuteronomy 5:12-15) - we too today are **identified** as a **people liberated from slavery, oppression, & anxiety** in the cosmic drama of **human salvation**.

***The God who sanctified the day of rest also sanctifies us* (2x).**

Now Following the movement of God, Jesus gives an indication as to the true meaning of the Sabbath - namely **REST**. That is, he places it against the universal horizon of God's intent that it **benefits ALL creation** - what is ultimately at stake is the health (physical and spiritual) of those who Sabbath - it is an eschatological urgency, in the interest of life and salvation. Jesus tells us to come and follow his example because he will "give you rest (Matt 11:28)." Jesus is here using two distinct words rendered in our English Bibles by the one word "rest."

- The 1st is a verb, the 2nd a noun.
- The 1st signifies a temporary rest (Sleep), one with the view of going on in the journey; the 2nd stands a more durable and lasting rest.
- The 1st is a rest to the conscience, the 2nd a rest to the soul.
- The 1st is a gift; the 2nd is a discovery -- the **discovery** of the Future/Present promise found in the book of Revelations 21 - that of **dwelling in a new heaven and a new earth**, the holy city where **God dwells with us and we dwell with God** (2x) - a city where all things are made new.

REMEMBER, we received the same promises as those people who have come before us in the wilderness… those with their backs against the wall. God called us to sabbath & rest from the beginning of time. Jesus echoed that call asking "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me - Take my yoke upon you, get away with me and you'll recover your life. **I'll show you how to take a real rest** - find rest for your souls. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. **Learn** (2x) the unforced rhythms of grace. Keep company with me and **you'll learn to live freely and lightly** (Matt 11:28-30 MSG)." Enter into the house of rest! While entering will not be easy, there is a guide, an exemplar leading us down the pathway to discover rest.

In CONCLUSION -- I want to meet you in the sabbath space, so I have a few questions to leave you with. What does the concept of sabbathing and resting mean for you? What does the liberation given to you by the sabbath look, smell, feel, sound, and taste like? How will your body and mind feel during your sabbath? What **excites you** about the liberation that comes with Sabbathing? Lastly, how do you envision sabbathing as a lifestyle? **Remember Paul's exhortation as found in today's text - "God keeps renewing the promise and setting the date to come into God's rest as *today*.** Remember that the promise of "arrival" and "rest" is still there for God's people **- all of humanity as we are all made in the image, likeness, and imitation of God.**

God is at rest & has invited us into their rest - So **let us** step into this promise that has not yet been fulfilled, knowing that at the end of the journey we'll surely rest with God. **Keep looking for the doorway which leads to rest, pay keen attention and learn to follow the little bird that restlessly calls us to find rest, because as we keep on seeking rest, we will eventually find a way to lay all of our burdens down and arrive at the place of rest.**

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REMEMBER:

The Sabbath is to be kept holy because the Sabbath **reminds us of who we are.**

Sabbath reminds us that we are human beings & not human *doings*.

Sabbath reminds us that our value is not calculated from what we produce.
Sabbath reminds us that we are to **enjoy** life and not just **endure** life.
Sabbath reminds us that God is with us throughout the rest of the week.
Sabbath reminds us that we are loved for being just who we are.
-- Joel's takeaway: Take a Sabbath… Be diligent to enter that rest: -- the rest that we are invited to enjoy alongside God -- The rest is there for us because humanity is **Qualified (all here today are Qualified - 2x)** to step into rest, BUT God does not force it upon us - **We Must make a concerted effort in choosing to Sabbath**… Look for Sabbath's Door, it's there if we intentionally search for it… I experienced and almost passed up the open door of Sabbathing yesterday.
It's time to rest and remove ourselves from the Rat Race - That Royal Consciousness.
Intentionally keep searching for Sabbaths door & you'll eventually arrive at the place of rest - For Rest is a HOLY Act!!!

SERMON: 2 Sides of the Line (2 times - Preached sermon again as there were technical difficulties during the original Zoom sermon. The congregation asked me to come in and redo the sermon in person. This is the first sermon that I did without reading directly from the manuscript.)

John 7: 53 - 8:11 MSG - Then they all went home. 1-2 Jesus went across to Mount Olives, but he was soon back in the Temple again. Swarms of people came to him. He sat down and taught them. 3-6 The religion scholars and Pharisees led in a woman who had been caught in an act of adultery. They stood her in plain sight of everyone and said, "Teacher, this woman was caught red-handed in the act of adultery. Moses, in the Law, gives orders to stone such persons. What do you say?" They were trying to trap him into saying something incriminating so they could bring charges against him. 6-8 Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger in the dirt. They kept at him, badgering him. He straightened up and said, "The sinless one among you, go first: Throw the stone." Bending down again, he wrote some more in the dirt. 9-10 Hearing that, they walked away, one after another, beginning with the oldest. The woman was left alone. Jesus stood up and spoke to her. "Woman, where are they? Does no one condemn you?" 11 "No one, Master." "Neither do I," said Jesus. "Go on your way. From now on, don't sin."

Have you ever judged someone based on your own embedded beliefs → What your parents/grandparents/aunties/uncles, this world & the church told you was "good"?
Whose voice are you listening to? Which side of the **scriptural line** are you standing on & Embodying?
I know that I have & I do JUDGE people → and **I've experienced being judged**… both in church and out of church.
Pull over story: I was stopped by the police for driving a luxury car while black. The Police officer which tailgated me for about 2 miles, told me he couldn't read my license plate. And, although they found nothing wrong with my license, nor the car, nor the car's insurance, he managed to hold me there for over 30 minutes. **End** with the shirt I was wearing quoting Psalm 80, and the cross around my neck being visible.
We are Planted in GOD - Planted people are rooted into the place of God, rested on by God, restored by the One who planted them ... within in this one story there are 2 different types of judgements→ one of oppression & destruction AND one of protection.
Disfellowshipping as Jehovah's Witness:
Due to fornication - that doesn't really bother me…
The issue is when I changed my life, repented, and decided to go back… I experienced what many of you have experienced in your life - the judgment of the religious leaders - *some who were friends that I/You grew up with* - like the unnamed woman in our pericope.
Again - within in this one story there are 2 different types of judgements→ one of oppression & destruction AND one of protection. What happens in our narrative isn't that much different. HOWEVER, I want to lift out the route that Jesus took - the way that Jesus judged, the way that God judges.

Gospel of John - We're not sure who the author of John is, however, it is attributed to John the Beloved Apostle. The Gospel of John sets out to prove that JESUS is "God's Passover Lamb (***ti mouton***) AND That He (Jesus) forgives the sins of the world! (*John 1:29* MSG); I know that

most of us know the story we're considering today… BUT I propose that many of us have never carefully examined it. WHILE All use the same Bible, it doesn't mean that we read, study, interpret or apply it the same. So, I want to ask you to examine the pericope of "The Woman Caught in Adultery" with me.

Background on Jesus:
Jesus the Tekton - Yeshua - Christ, Messiah (other 50 names and titles in the Bible) was a revolutionary & reconciliatory prophet who Grew up in an impoverished colonized Ghetto named Nazareth → Archaeological research suggests that in Jesus' day Nazareth was a religiously conservative, tiny farming village, of about 120 people - all from 1 branch of the Davidic line - located far from the main trade routes. Jesus' roots as one of the oppressed of the world, along with his connection to the Divinity inside (*the imago and imitatio Dei, the Holy Spirit*) - which we (2x) also have access too, **convicted** Jesus to **compassionately** connect with the poor, the destitute, the impoverished, the downtrodden, the subjugated … All those stuck with their backs against the wall… & caused Jesus to step into his prophetic vocation as a *Spirit-bearer* of justice to all the nations - which according to the Torah, Jesus' fulfills in their midst when he -

1) Calls For slaves are to be freed
2) Calls For debts are to be canceled
3) Calls For the land is to lie fallow - environmental justice
4) Calls For reparations - for the land & wealth to be returned or redistributed to its original holder - the one who worked for it
5) Calls to bring hope to ALL people, especially those on the margins, those with their backs against the wall….

because the way Jesus approaches this unnamed "sinner" in the story is the same way that Jesus approaches us - you/me/friends/enemies/believers/ AND even unbelievers.
By the time we get to this pericope in the Gospel of John, Jesus is already known as the spirit bearer of justice, and people seek him, and are falling in love with him - similar to the way he is showing agapē love to them (the othered/the downtrodden, the Disinherited/ A member of the tribe of the "Least of These."

John 7:53 - 8:11 MSG -
Then they all went home. (All who were at the Festival of Booths/Feast of Tabernacles/Those celebrating a day of Thanksgiving at the end of the harvest - Thanksgiving for the provisions of & from YHWH)

Jesus went across to Mount Olives, but he was soon back in the Temple again. - So, the Feast of Tabernacles has just concluded, and everyone had gone home, but Jesus goes out and spends the night in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives… and based on Jesus' habits when he withdraws to be alone, he is spending some alone time with God in prayer, so that he could be replenished. Because on the very next morning, Jesus was back spreading the Good News in the Temple

Swarms of people came to him. He sat down and taught them**. & So right in the midst of Jesus teaching the people in the Temple Again --** Remember that it was often in the Temple that

Jesus delivered powerful lessons about a renewed communal relationship with God to the growing crowds – he was always in **earshot** of the increasingly paranoid religious leaders

3-6 The religion scholars and Pharisees led in a **woman** who had been caught in an act of adultery (μοιχεία - tied to נָאַף *naaph* of Lev 20:10). **Here the religious scholars interrupt Jesus' teaching… And just as a means of clarification,** a Scribe was basically a lawyer, who was the expert in interpreting the Law within the Scriptures & Pharisees were very well known for their strict adherence to their oral religious tradition and the Mosaic Law… In the ancient Near East an oral version of the law enabled the contents of the Torah to be spread amongst the common people. The bringing of the woman to Jesus was obviously an attempt at entrapment.

They stood her in plain **sight of everyone** and said, "Teacher, ***this woman*** (3x) was caught red-handed in the act of adultery. The religious leaders brought ONLY the woman who had been caught in **the act of adultery** to the feet of Jesus in order that He might pronounce the proper judgment upon her. Now we all know that adultery is not something one does alone, they didn't bring her in because they caught her in the act of masturbation, BUT she was actively found in the act of adultery. Yet her sexual partner - the man in this situation - was not brought to Jesus… even though the Man caught in adultery was also supposed to be stoned. Why? (*did the man run, did the man cowardly blame her similar to what Adam did with Eve?*) The purpose was to trap Jesus, because in their minds if Jesus neglected to suggest stoning, as the law required, He could be charged with being a lawbreaker & if he went along with the stoning, the crowds would stop following him because he had moved away from his agapē love ethic. This gets clearer in the next lines of the pericope… which suggest that the Religious Leaders, in this case, are less interested in ensuring justice than in centering Jesus at the center of the dilemma.

Moses, **in the Law (2x),** gives orders to stone such persons - *This Woman*. What do you say?" Immediately the religious leaders present the fictitious opposition between **Moses and the law of God** & **Jesus and the agapē of God. This opposition of the law ethic and the love ethic** is at the heart of the conflict between these two groups. Many today often speak and think of the Jesus group - the *eklesia*, the Church - in the synagogue as Christians. But this premature use of a name/title that had not yet been coined is misleading. It suggests that this new religion - Christianity - had already made its mark in the religious circles even while the struggle for its independence was still going on. The ousting Moses from his central place as God's representative in his dealings with his people, and casting Jesus the Carpenter's son into that central place as God's representative was effectively the establishment of a new religion. It was an uncompromising rejection of Moses and the law in favor of the grace and truth brought by Christ.

They were trying to trap him into saying something incriminating so they could bring charges against him. The problem was that the Pharisees were intimidated by Jesus' popularity, and it caused them to fear losing their influence with the people, their own affluent seats and power within the empirical theological system of the Pax Romana. They also feared that the people might revolt against "Empire," choosing instead to follow Jesus as their political leader and sitting his light yoke and burden instead of under the heavy yoke and burden of the Roman empire. In actuality, there is little evidence that the fine for the indictment of adultery - stoning or hanging - was carried out very often in first-century Palestine. BUT it didn't matter to the

religious leaders. Their hearts were in the entrapment of Jesus & It looked like a win/win for them. (1) If Jesus disavowed the law of Moses, his credibility as a religious leader would be instantly undermined: he could even be dismissed as a lawless person and even be charged in the religious courts with serious offences. (2) If he upheld the law of Moses, he would not only be supporting a position that was largely unpopular but one that was probably not carried out in public life, and, worse, which would have been hard to square with his well-known agapē ethic - demonstrating compassion for the broken and disreputable, his quickness to forgive and restore, and his announcement of the life-transforming power bound in the connection to the divine within. (3) It even opened the possibility of Jesus getting into serious trouble with the Roman overlord. If in the name of Moses, he pronounced the death sentence on this woman, and it was actually carried out, he would have been infringing the **exclusive rights** of the Roman prefect, who alone had the authority to impose capital sentences (*cf.* notes on 18:31–32). …

6-8 Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger in the dirt. They kept at him, badgering him. Instead of falling into the Religious Leaders (dare I say political trap) Jesus decided to use his theological imagination and decipher the imperceptible third choice - Jesus ignored them… that's like for those of us in the 21st century, getting a call or text message and ignoring it. None of us know exactly what Jesus wrote on the ground, but in his actions, Jesus drew a theological line in the dirt. Maybe Jesus' writing on the ground was a delaying action, so that the religious leaders could potentially look at ethic grace in the Old Testament… there's even a song about it → Elevation Church's song the Blessing says --
(The Lord bless you, And keep you, Make His face shine upon you, And **be gracious** to you, The Lord turn His, Face toward you, And give you peace, May His presence go before you, And behind you, and beside you, All around you, and within you, He is with you, He is with you)
But his demeanor and disposition - when going to non-verbal communication - did not satisfy Jesus' opponents. However ambiguous his writing may be to us today; the words did not have the desired effect because the text says that the accusers kept badgering him. So, Jesus decided to speak up.

He straightened up and said, "The sinless one among you, go first: Throw the stone."
This verdict… is a direct reference to the Old Testament conception that the witnesses (3 required) of the crime must be the first to throw the stones, … According to the Torah (Deut 17:7), the actual witnesses were responsible for casting the first stones / punishment on both sexual partners. BUT here again Jesus went beyond the usual interpretation of punishment for one's sin/sins - that being death - gave us a theological re-imagining of the outcome of every saint/sinner falling into sin (or even caught in the middle of sinning) and opening the door of Grace, ALL without calling into question the Mosaic law. AND at the same time Jesus was able to open the hearts of the Religious Leaders -to their own "sins or Short-Comings.". The standard Jesus demanded was that the accusers - the religious leaders - themselves not be subject to accusation. In his short claim Jesus told The Body of God (*I call humanity members of the Body of God because we are all made in the image, likeness, and imitation of God*) - those directly in front of him and those who were to follow - that they are fully notified of the temptation to self-righteously judge others. And once Jesus uttered this startling declaration, he returned to his writing in the dirt.… drawing his division line

Bending down again, he wrote some more in the dirt. **9-10** Hearing that, they walked away, one after another, beginning with the oldest. The woman was left alone.
At that point the religious leaders became uncomfortable and maybe even embarrassed with the political court case they had brought to Jesus, and they left. I could imagine that when the accusers came, they came with their (Biggest & Best) stones ready to hurl them at this woman… or a parallel today would be them coming with their bible apps wanting to hurl them at whoever in standing in for the first century woman in 2022 - *the disinherited, those with their backs against the wall, those who are still unnamed and unseen today* - and when they - the Body of God of yesterday- were called to consider their own lives, their own past, and the fact that "Every saint has a past; every sinner has a future… they all left. With the departure of the legalists - the Scribes and Pharisees - the focus shifts to the woman and Jesus.

Jesus stood up and spoke to her. "Woman, where are they? Does no one condemn you?"
As Jesus gets up to address the woman, he doesn't do so as an accuser. He simply starts with two intertwining questions - The first concerned the presence of her accusers, and the second was whether or not anyone had officially condemned her. She answers…

11 "No one, Master." "Neither do I," said Jesus. "Go on your way. From now on, don't sin." In conclusion through further use of his prophetic imagination - or as I like to say by discovering and aligning with the divine within himself - Jesus announces another verdict… Jesus says *neither do I condemn you*. The confidence and personal absoluteness of Jesus' words confirm that Jesus came not to condemn, but to save. Jesus left HER and US with an anecdote, namely the proper response to mercy is purity in the future … Not a purity of our actions, but the purity of our hearts. The purity that calls for us to act similar to Jesus and to demonstrate agapē love to our neighbors near and far, faithful, and unfaithful. Jesus' verdict was in fact a strict charge for her - this unnamed woman - to live from this point on very differently, as one connected to the divine within - the opportunity for a life anew.
Go back to Pull over story - when I started this sermon my experience was that of a person being put in a mold of what one person, one belief system deemed proper - a refugee. It's a parallel to the verses we just read. An unnamed, lower class, not to be seen woman / a piece of chattel was pulled over by the police of the temple. She was brought without the one she was sleeping with as the one to be discarded / thrown away / imprisoned - a refugee. She was judged by the followers of YHWH. But Jesus saw this unclean woman differently → He saw her as one that would find refuge in him. Jesus sees us differently. We are Christians, and we are called to follow the example of CHRIST → In the pericope Christ reminded her to continue to live differently from that day onward. Jesus demonstrated the way for the Scribes, the Pharisees, and the woman to step into the divinity within them - *we are made in that image and likeness of God… we are also made in the imitation of God* - and imitate the way he as a human being lived his life. This is the very same invitation that we -Christians - have today, the invitation to imitate the way Christ as a human being lived his life. A call to stand on the very same division line that Jesus has placed in this pericope. Jesus provides us a place of refuge & at the same time calls for us to be a people of refuge for all the refugees around us.
For me, the primary issue isn't what does the Bible say… as a Christian, the primary issue for me as a follower of Christ is what would Jesus do? Which side of the line are you setting your feet on? As for me and my household, we will be standing on the line with Jesus.

Benediction ~ May the road rise up to meet you in your search of self, charged with being the impetus of Agapē Love in the world. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. May the God's hope fill you up with joy, fill you up with peace, so that your believing lives, filled with the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit, will brim over with hope! Let's go out this morning being like Jesus in our hearts.

SERMON 4: Hope in the Midst of Chaos

Zephaniah 3:14-20: Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgments against you; he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival." I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it. I will deal with ALL your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord.

HAPPY NEW YEAR!!! Welcome to Advent, a time of expectation & preparation… for the Coming of Jesus. I went to the lectionary and the Spirit led me to this… Zephaniah 3:14-20… Not only do you see Christ you also get a message of ***redemption*** to the Body of God today and which clearly gives today's faithful that same hope.
1st week of advent about Hope: **I hope for a lot of things… My PUBLIC Parking Spot…**
Hope & Expectations

> "My" Parking Spots When I get Home - a public Parking Spot
> RAT EXPERIMENTS: In the 1950s, a scientist named Curt Richter conducted a shocking experiment. He placed 2 sets of rats - docile domesticated rats and obstinate wild rats - in water, watching them desperately swim until exhaustion. The 34 "wild rats," were expected to fight hard for their survival as they are exceptional swimmers, strong, savage, and ferocious. All 34 wild rates survived for only a few minutes. BUT, for the 12 docile domesticated rats, Ritcher would scoop them out, dry them, and put them back in the bucket just as they were about to drown. The only thing that had changed was that the docile domesticated rats had been saved before, so they had a semblance that the situation was not actually hopeless. Now, here's the twist: these docile "rescued" rats swam for 60 hours, far exceeding their initial expectations. Just a fleeting glimpse of the escape from "hopelessness" ignited a spark of determination, propelling them far beyond their perceived limits. - This, family, is the essence of Hope.

We've gotta whole lot of hopes... new job, raise, spouse, chocolate ice cream, vacation
This is a different type of Hope!!! … It's All About Jesus. My Hope must be pinned on Jesus. Your Hope Must be pinned on Jesus. Our Hope Must be pinned on Jesus. Our Hope MUST BE pinned on almost the opposite meaning of the hope that we use in our everyday world - the "I hope I find my parking" type of hope. We need TIKVAH.
Hope in HEBREW - TIKVAH - … It is an expectation, and a strong expression of faith. Hope is A rock you can rely on. HOPE is interwoven in our fabric as human beings There is a Difference Between Parking Spot Hope & Jesus Hope… The Jesus Hope is knowing - a confident expectation - for a fact that the desired outcome will happen. This is the hope of our pericope: a Hope for the restoration of the Nation of Israel. The People experiencing what I just read are the same people who just at the beginning of the chapter 3 were being Cursed… Zephaniah 3:2b, 8 - These people - Israel & maybe us - "has not trusted in the Lord; it has not drawn near to its God…. I (God) desire to pour out upon them my indignation."

YET THEY REMAIN HOPEFUL… THEY LEAVE AN EXAMPLE FOR US

Hope Is Expectant

vs 14-15 ~ Sing, Shout, Rejoice… with ALL Your HEART… The Lord has taken away the judgments against you… the Lord, is in your midst.

REJOICE is a military term: used for good news of victory and deliverance.

Mariame Kaba - BUT THIS HOPE doesn't preclude feeling sadness or frustration or anger or any other emotion that makes total sense. Hope is a discipline; we must practice HOPE every single day.

it's easy to feel a sense of hopelessness … ECONOMIC INSECURITY & WARS & COVID & POLITICS & HOMELESSNESS & The Murder/Lynching of Black Bodies & School to Prison Pipeline - WE MIGHT FALL INTO nothing's ever going to change… Devil is coming for us BUT I CHOOSE HOPE - I choose to trust people; I choose to HOPE that I can leave a good example - family, children, friends, church; I choose to HOPE that agapē Love requires Faith & Hope

Hope Is Foundational to Faith

Vs 16-18 Do not fear; do not grow weak/be discouraged. The Lord, your God, is in your midst - *lives among you*… God will rejoice over you with gladness; God will renew you in God's love; God will remove disaster from you.

You cannot have hope unless it is tied together with faith. You have hope because you have faith, and you have faith because you have hope. **God's Promises are designed to inspire HOPE**. From Genesis to Revelations, the αλπηα of the bible to the ωμεγα. God Provides; God is Present; God is our Protector; Jesus Christ.

Hope Is a Gift from God

Vs 19-20 I will save the lame and gather the outcast, change their shame into praise; I will bring you home, I will make you renowned and praised, I will restore you.

Look Back at Faithful Believers in the Bible (Abraham, David, Sarah, Rachel). **They realized & held on to the Gift of Hope From GOD.** WHY? This is God Speaking, The GOD that promises in Isaiah 55:10-11: "the promise that I (the Most Divine) make does not return to me, having accomplished nothing. It - the gift of restoration - is realized as I desire and is fulfilled as I intend." Hope requires complete trust and confidence; it requires faith. Faith grounds… Faith is the foundation upon which both our desires and expectations reside. Faith is at the root of our ability to hope. In the Spirit Of Advent - the Coming of the LORD I want to pronounce that I love Jesus WHY - Jesus didn't **judge** AND Jesus didn't **disregard** the oppressed: those who had fornicated, committed adultery, the prostitute, the homeless; the injured on the street with his fellow believers walking past as if they didn't exist; those with Bad Tempers; I'm Talking About YOU & ME. It is In Jesus I find Hope. Think about what you've heard about Jesus… What you've experienced in your life. *This week as you go from day to day* - WITH THE STRESS OF LIFE (with rent or your mortgage due and things are tight, sickness, COVID, family and church obligations) - STAY HOPEFUL!!!

Everything you do as a BELIEVER flow from Hope.

Why do you pray? Hope.

Why do you witness? Hope.

Why do you endure hardship, trials, or persecution? Hope.

Why did many who have gone before us & you yourself sacrifice, give, serve, even lose their lives for the message of the gospel? One word, hope.
I want you to consider the Hope that you get from Jesus… FOR GREAT IS HIS FAITHFULNESS
I want you to Keep Hope Alive… FOR GREAT IS GOD'S FAITHFULNESS
The Son of God is Coming!!!

SERMON 5: Do Not Fear

Mark 4:35-41 MSG - 35-38 Late that day he said to them, “Let’s go across to the other side.” They took him in the boat as he was. Other boats came along. A huge storm came up. Waves poured into the boat, threatening to sink it. And Jesus was in the stern, head on a pillow, sleeping! They roused him, saying, “Teacher, is it nothing to you that we’re going down?” 39-40 Awake now, he told the wind to pipe down and said to the sea, “Quiet! Settle down!” The wind ran out of breath; the sea became smooth as glass. Jesus reprimanded the disciples: “Why are you such cowards? Don’t you have any faith at all?” 41 They were in absolute awe, staggered. “Who is this, anyway?” they asked. “Wind and sea at his beck and call!”

II. The Storm on the Sea of Galilee
A. The Context of the Story
They were fisherman & knew/lived through storms.
B. The Fears of the Disciples
Metaphorical Storm
C. The Miraculous Intervention of Jesus
Nature Listened to Jesus

III. The Message of Jesus: "Do Not Be Afraid."
A. The Power of Fear
Anytime God shows up we get "Do Not Be Afraid!"
B. Jesus' Reassurance to His Disciples
C. The Importance of Trusting in Jesus
Do you have any examples of faith working in your life?

IV. Trusting in Jesus in the Midst of Life's Storms
A. Storms in Our Lives
Becoming a Single Father - *Lou & Poverty*
B. Responding to Storms with Faith
Did the work, even when in doubt.
C. Finding Peace in the Midst of Life's Storms

V. Overcoming Fear Through Faith in Jesus
A. The Role of Faith in Overcoming Fear
B. Trusting in Jesus in All Circumstances
C. Living a Life Free from Fear

VI. Conclusion
A. As the storms of your life will inevitably show up - Do Not Fear.
B. Call to Action: Trusting in Jesus and Living a Life Free from Fear

SERMON 6: Return to God's Glory

One Of History's Greatest Speeches because - It addresses the most insidious effects of colonialism and imperialism that American Culture & Church has faced from the beginning of its existence until today: discrimination, broken promises, and the need to believe that things will be better.

- I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.
- I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.
- I have a dream that one day… little Black boys and Black girls (*little Black non-binary children*) will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls (*little white non-binary children*) as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today.
- I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.
- Has that Dream been made plain? Can you see that dream in your Church?

- Explain the meaning of decolonization and why it is relevant to the Church today.
- Introduce the text and its context (Exodus 34:29-35).

I. The Glory of God Revealed (Exodus 34:29-30)

- Describe the scene of Moses coming down from Mount Sinai with the tablets of the Law.
- Explain the significance of Moses' face shining because he had been in the presence of God.
    - To not scare the people
    - So, they would not see when the glow leaves (ie: thinking God's presence leaves)
- Emphasize that the glory of God was the focus of the Israelites' worship and obedience.

II. The Distortion of God's Glory (Exodus 32:1-10, 19-25)

- Describe the incident of the golden calf and its aftermath.
    - They went back to what they knew -- what had become genetic so to speak.
- Explain how the Israelites' desire for a tangible representation of God led them to create a false idol.
    - Are you creating false idols today?
        - Is the church your false idol?
- Emphasize that the Israelites' disobedience and lack of faith distorted the glory of God and led to judgment.

III. The Call to Return to God's Glory (Exodus 34:1-9, 33)

- Describe the scene of Moses going back up to Mount Sinai to receive the tablets again.
- Explain how God revealed his character to Moses, emphasizing his mercy and justice.
- Emphasize that God called the Israelites to repent and return to him, to worship him alone and obey his commands.

IV. The Application to the Church Today

- Explain how the Church has been influenced by colonialism, imperialism, and racism.
- Emphasize that the Church must recognize and repent of its complicity in these sins.
- Call for a return to the glory of God as the central focus of the Church's worship and mission.
- Provide practical suggestions for decolonizing the Church, such as diversifying leadership, learning from non-Western traditions, and addressing systemic injustices.

Conclusion:

- Call for a response of repentance, faith, and action.
    - Action being following in the lived life of the carpenter Jesus -
        - Am I acting like Jesus would've today?
        - This week consider if you are following in the steps of the Carpenter.
- End with a prayer of dedication to God's glory and a vision of a decolonized Church that reflects the beauty and diversity of his creation.

Appendix C: Hip Hop & Theology Podcast

Song List

Session 1	Thugz Mansion - Tupac
Session 2	Prayer & I Still Pray - Rick Ro$$
Session 3	Juicy - Biggie
Session 4	C.R.E.A.M - WuTang
Session 6	Alright - Kendrick Lamar
Session 7	Lucifer - DMX
Session 8	U.N.I.T.Y. - Queen Latifah
Session 9	Lost Ones / Everything is Everything - Lauryn Hill
Session 10	Love Yourz - J. Cole
Session 11	It was a good day - Ice Cube
Session 12	F*ck Da police - NWA
Session 13	Higher Level - KRS One
Session 14	Life Goes On - Tupac
Session 15	Slippin - DMX
Session 16	Stressed Out - A Tribe Called Quest
Session 17	Be Free - J. Cole
Session 18	Hero - Nas
Session 19	Changes - Tupac
Session 20	Revolution - Arrested Development
Session 21	The Message - Grandmaster Flash
Session 22	Eat To Live - Talib Kweli
Session 23	What's Free - Meek Mill
Session 24	Fight the Power - Public Enemy
Session 25	WAP - Cardi B
Session 26	Children's Story - Slick Rick

Thugz Mansion

Joël: [00:00:00] Welcome to Hip Hop and Theology, a space of theological and decolonizing thoughts that attempts to increase humanity through the theo-poetics of hip hop and theology. I'm excited to get into today's dialogue. Let's get into it. Thank you so much for joining us. Yes, indeed. Being a part of this. Yes, indeed. Thanks for having me. Thank you. I'm excited. I'm excited to, um, I don't know, I'm excited to have this conversation and hear some wisdom from you. My advisor man, you know, y'all put up one of the OGs for this joint. Your pedigree, your pedigree. Uh, speaks for itself. You know what? Now that we're saying that, JP, thank you very much. Do you want to introduce yourself a little bit for our audience? Sure. For your audience. Thanks for having me again. Uh, my name is JP Reynolds. I am a music artist, and I'm a creative consultant as well. Uh, I have an M.Div. from Yale Divinity School. I feel like that's relevant to offer in this conversation for the folks who may be tuning into this, this, uh, this discussion. Um. And dev and I also have a Bachelor of Arts from or a Bachelor of Arts in African American Studies, both degrees from Yale. Um, and I'm a I'm a musician. I'm a, I'm a rapper songwriter. I'll be singing sometimes. Uh, I'm a band leader. And, you know, we out here. Thank you so, so much. I just want to give you a website. Your website is officiallyJP.com. You guys want to play the song one time and then we move in. And why not?

Tupac: [00:02:06] She tired of getting shot at. Tired of getting chased by the police and arrested. Niggas need a spot where we can kick it. A spot where we belong. That's just for us. Niggas ain't got to get all dressed up and be Hollywood. You know what I mean? Where do niggas go when we die? Ain't no heaven for a thug, nigga. That's why we go to thug mansion. That's the only place where thugs get it free. And you got to be a G at Thug Mansion. A place that's been my quiet night. Time to unwind. So much pressure in this life of mine. I cried times I once contemplated suicide and would have tried. But when I held that knife, all I could see was my mama's eyes. No one knows my struggle. They only see the trouble. Not knowing. It's hard to

carry on. When no one loves you. Picture me inside the misery of poverty. No man alive has ever witnessed struggles I survived. Praying hard for better days. Promise to hold on. Me and my dawgs ain't have a choice but to roll on. We found a finally spot to kick it. Where we could drink liquor. And no one bickers over trick shit. A spot where we can smoke in peace and even know we G's. We still visualize places that we can roll in peace. And in my mind's eye I see this place. The players going past and got a spot for us all so we can ball and bounce back.

Tupac: [00:03:20] Oh my God. Marystown. Paradise in the Sky. It plays that prank on me. Oh, God. Now.

Tupac: [00:03:36] Will I survive all the fights in the darkness? Trouble spots. They tell me. Home is where the heart is. Dear departed, I said. Tattoo tears and couldn't sleep. Good for multiple years. Witnessed fierce cats. Gunshots. Nobody cares. Seen the politicians banners. They'd rather see us locked in chains. Please explain why they can't stand us. Is there a way for me to change? Or am I just a victim.

Tupac: [00:03:57] Of things I did to maintain? I need a place to rest my head with the little bit of homeboys that remain.

Tupac: [00:04:03] Cause all the rest there is their spot for us to grow. If you find it, I'll be right behind you. Show me and I'll go. How can I be peaceful? I'm coming from the bottom. Watch my daddy scream. Peace. What other man shot him? I need a house that's full of love. When I need to escape.

Tupac: [00:04:18] The deadly places. Slinging drugs and thugs. Man, I ain't no. Come to pray for me. Ho ho ho! Oh, right. I've been in Paradise in the sky. Tell your mama don't cry. Your baby boy's doing good.

Tupac: [00:04:45] Tell the homies I'm in heaven and they ain't got hoods. Seen a show with Marvin Gaye last night? It had me shook. Shrimp and peppermint snacks with Jackie Wilson and Sam Cooke. Then some lady named Billie Holiday sang sittin there kickin it with Malcolm. To the day came Lil Tasha. Show grown. Tell the lady in the liquor store that she's forgiven.

Tupac: [00:05:03] So come home. Maybe in time you understand. Only God can save us.

Tupac: [00:05:07] With Miles Davis cutting loose with the band. Just think. All the people that you knew in the past that passed on. They in heaven found peace. That last picture, a place that they exist together. It has to be a place better than this in heaven. So right before I sleep, dear God, with a mask, remember this face. Save me.

Tupac: [00:05:24] A place. And. Happy holidays and.

Tupac: [00:05:30] Family.

Tupac: [00:05:32] Sound. Paradise in the Sky. My. Is that right for me? Oh, come now, Benjamin. Hey. It's me. Hang on. Oh. My style. Paradise in the sky. Ain't no place for me.

Joël: [00:05:59] Thank you, thank you and Aaron, Gogoh, and JP thank you so much for joining us. Um, this is the first time I heard the song that we're doing, Thugz Mansion. It resonated with me right away. Um, and the reason I say that. I think about. What I have heard about. Quote unquote heaven from church. From, you know. My grandfather's a bishop. My uncle like. There's like a deeply. In like that type of theology is deeply embedded in in my learning, right from when I was a kid that was put inside of me, and I never wanted to be in that heaven. So, I heard this song and like, it clicked, it clicked. So, I wanted to invite you here. Um, JP here, you're an artist. You're a musician. And. I would go on to say a lot of stuff when you talk about. I'd like your social justice base. Right. So, I think, um, it's important even when talking about social justice. We talk about it here on earth, here and what's happening to our bodies, black, brown, minority bodies. But we need to think about in a religious setting as well. And that is the reason that, um, all of us are here today. So, um, anybody else want to jump in and anybody else have anything to say? I mean, I could jump in, um.

JP: [00:07:47] I like the way you set that up. I like the version that you chose because it's different versions of Thugz Mansion is the one with NAS featured on it. Um. Uh, this is a funny thing, you know, this is like, you know, if I want to use the big words like the eschatological concern of Tupac, you know what I'm saying? Yeah. And we mentioned the heaven peace. And it's really interesting to me is that this song with his three verses where he sets up his three verses, the first two verses are actually more on earth as it is in heaven. Um, than heaven itself, right? Like. He's actually talking about where we are on the ground. I want this stuff here. Right? And I feel like the song often gets used and even like where the hooks are written and constructed. Uh, we're thought to think of the otherworldly aspects, but Tupac is actually concerned mostly in the song with this worldly what's happening right now and where we are now. I want this now, not until the third verse. Does he actually say anything about the real, like the imagination of another place.

JP: [00:08:50] Um, so it's interesting to think about heaven, because I feel like a lot of times Christians get caught up in the other worldly, the priestly, and not with the prophetic here and now. And Tupac is kind of balancing those things, but he's actually giving a lot more space for the here and now. So I just want to offer that because that's something that's the first thing I thought of when I heard the song, like, because when I first heard this when I was younger, I said, oh, this is about heaven. This is about like the far-off place, like when we die and then when I listen to it with this and in this context with my grown man brain on it, I was like, oh man, he's talking about right now. He's talking about like right now. So, I just want to offer that too, just because it's not solely about. The next world is also about this world. Most definitely. Most definitely. I'm gonna let you guys. Aaron. Go, go. If you have anything. Otherwise, we need to execute this text and we can jump in. I've always looked at Tupac and the like as, um. Speaking to the theology of the outcast.

Gogoh: [00:09:57] You know, they always have this mentality that. Life right now is hell. And they couldn't really be that much, that much worse than what we're physically going through. Because for one, this is all we know. And although we have an idea of an afterlife or we have an idea of a heaven. Um, there's really no point in focusing on the hereafter when the here and now is. Painful enough. You know, it's one thing to say we're looking forward to all of these things in

the afterlife. You know, for those who don't believe, you know, if there is an afterlife, but you tend to waste. Life by focusing on what you cannot touch and taste and prove and see. When all that you can touch and taste and prove and see. Doesn't help you. You know, it's one thing that you're black and brown. You're already, you know, outcast. But then to be a thug in the brown, black and brown community makes you, um. Relegate you to. I don't want I don't want to use the word lower, but it relegates you to to a smaller portion of an already subjugated demographic, you know? So how much more do they or does he and any thug, if you will, you know, how much do they have to struggle? How much do they have to suffer? More than even just a, you know, the average black or brown individual, you know, so this, this, this idea of, of the theology of the outcast, I even look at it as, um, that's how he looks at it. But I think for any, any subset of, of society, there is this type of mentality, there is this idea. So, I'm sure there's a theology for migrants. I'm sure there's a theology for, you know, for those who who are battling a particular disease, there's a theology of cancer patients. There's a whole it'll run the whole gamut. But when you're looking at it through his eyes, you can see and hear the struggle.

Joël: [00:11:56] Would you both said, it makes me really think about. The here and now first, right. Talk about the here now. And you start right off at the beginning of the song. And Tupac's talking about. We those who are marginalized, right? Um, as an American would say, the black bodies we need somewhere where we could be, somewhere where we could kick it, somewhere that belongs to us. Right? And I think that's. That's the overall theme of the whole song. And in general, I think. The reason this this lends to theology. Another one is because, you know, the Bible, religion, theology is the same thing. It's trying to place it in a place, you know, humanity in a place, or we have tried to place ourselves as a better way to say it in a place, you know, where we find some solace, some peace when things are bad, some way to look for some, some goodness, you know. And for a lot of people like the, the whole ain't no heaven for a thug is what you've been told. So, it's about like, what's a thug, right? Like, you look at me and I don't fit the normal description of a thug. I don't think, you know, maybe for carrying out there something. I'm not sure. But we go into some of, of his lyrics and if you guys want to go into it, I'll pull out some of them. Right. He starts off pretty early. He's talking about the pressure in his life, the crimes he had to, to the times he cried or thought about suicide. I don't know about you guys, but.

Joël: [00:13:43] I have gone through a lot. Talk about poverty. You know, I was homeless at 19, with a girlfriend to take care of and a child coming and trying to figure it out. Homeless. That ain't easy at 19. Like you don't have the Anchorage, right? You don't have all the knowledge you have, like like I have now in order to start, I became homeless because it was a shame that he was a leader in the church. And I got somebody pregnant. Right. So, because of that, instead of listening to the love thy neighbor right, love your enemy ethic that the Bible talks about like that agapē love. The love, othering love, right. Like that didn't even occur to him. It was like, I'm ashamed because people can look at me like, you had sex with somebody. What's that got to do with you? And this is something that transfers this this trauma that that's built that happens in life, also happens in religion. And what we're what Tupac I see at the beginning right there is talking about is like having some place where we can be even if you are a thug, even if you are an outcast, you know, and. I don't know anybody. That’s not. That hasn't done something that has outcast them right, like we've all done things we’re ashamed of. And I think that's the thing to talk about. Like. Being homeless. Thinking about selling drugs. Thinking about. I may have to

kill somebody. Like, those things happen, those things happen. And that's part of language that's there. Right?

Gogoh: [00:15:25] Traditional theology. Um, from the Eurocentric perspective, it has all these stop gaps as to how. Any of us. Can be accepted, if at all, you know. So, we have to do this. We have to do that. We can only go this way. There's only but there only, but so many ways that we can come to God, you know, based on how they how they see it. But listening to this song and, and my understanding is that. That the heaven he's ascribing to it features. Us in the way we want to be. It features us like it gives us a place to drink and smoke. Because that's what, as a thug, that's what they do. So, you want to do what you are most comfortable doing. You know, whatever it is you do to relax, and chill is what his heaven represents to him. Um, not that it has to be, you know, religiously based or even theologically based. Um, it doesn't have to be a physical place, doesn't have to be a church. It's just it's an idea that. If and when we have time to decompress and just hang out and just be. This is what it looks like. Because even if you even the name Thugz Mansion, that's a contradiction of terms to me, because a thug and a mansion are two terms that don't necessarily, you know, meet. You know, you can say a thug dreams of having a mansion, but when you put them together purposefully, um, the idea is that, okay, well, these contradictory terms make sense when you listen to what his experience is. You know, it's just a place for thugs to be themselves the same way, you know, Romans or the Greeks, you know, they had all these huge, um. These huge buildings, signifying whatever it is that they signify. I still don't understand it yet, but, um, they have their idea of what it is, and Tupac had his own idea, so it makes sense to me because I kind of understand it. But, um, to some others, it may. It may. You may not make any sense at all.

Joël: [00:17:39] I think while you were speaking, it made me go to one line and say, we found a place. We found a family spot to kick it. Like we found a place where we all could kick together. Right. Which has been going throughout the, the, the whole song talks about it. But for me that's like really a communion table where people come together, you know, and. Commune, right? Talk. Laugh. Cry, support each other like all those things. And I think. It's so much of it is missing. In many of our lives. Right, that, uh. That you need to intentionally look for it and put it forth. Right. The last recording, I talked about, my uncle was kidnapped. My uncle is still not free. It's been over 30 days that he's been kidnapped, right? And as a family we've been holding each other up. But it gets hard after 30 days. It's not the same communication that was happening like the first three days. The first four days, right? It's not that we've given up. It's not that we don't care. But put it bluntly, a lot of other shit has happened like since that time. And it's not like the weight of I can't like, I can't tell. People have had cancer. Cancer has spread. People are dying in the last 30 days. Like new stuff is happening. So, there's so much to hold. Sometimes you need a community to help you hold that. Yeah, that's. I was going to just offer that too. Right. Like in terms of community and Tupac and maybe the artist role in community. Right. Like especially when we're looking at.

Gogoh: [00:19:24] This first.

JP: [00:19:25] Versus kind of feels like and. There's a lot to say about a lot of these lyrics being, um, but I still I still feel like, you know, this, especially this first one she's still talking about, like, what's possible right now. This has nothing to do with the afterlife. This first verse, this is

like, I want this now, right? He's providing an imagination, even in spite of the misery of poverty. We finally, like, we finally found a spot to kick it. That means we've achieved it, right? Like it's not just something that's in the imagination space. It's also like, we can. We can do this right here and now. Um, but like the artist's role in community. In community that's in the misery of poverty. The artist is called to the mind's eye to see a place, even right now. Right. Even in this in flesh kind of experience. That we can see a place where we could go and pass it. We could go and kick it. Right. And it's interesting to think about Thugz Mansion, right? Like Gogo was saying, like Thugz Mansion. I think we relate that to religious language. You know, my father's house are many rooms, right? Like just mansions. Right? And it's like, not like when you're a rich rap star. You might. You might have a mansion with cats come over and they live this life in this mansion. And it's an interesting kind of transition to go from living in this miserable poverty to not wearing this mansion is actually landed home where cash is kicking me.

JP: [00:20:52] And, um, it's just interesting that Tupac is like, there's always grills or words people or, um, or poets or painters or artists whatever, who are calling us into these types of imagined, imagined spaces. Um, and who can name at once. Right? Like going from talking about imagining or contemplating suicide to visualizing peace in 16 bars. And it's a kind of masterful. And, um, it also speaks to like the, the normalization that we have with. The deep trauma. Paired with deep, deep hope. Right? It's a wild juxtaposition that we're able to experience. Right. Like you just mentioned something incredibly traumatic. Right. Like with your with your uncle, you just mentioned being homeless at 19. The fact that those are things that we can call upon and just cite and then also laugh or have joy and smile is particular to my experience, to the black experience, or to any, any community that's been oppressed, any oppressed experience where, you know, oppression and we know despair and a really real, palpable way. But we also know hope and we know resilience in a, in a deeply, deeply real way, too. Um, and that's what speaks that's what to me, that's what speaks to this whole thing, especially since especially I mean, this is like a posthumous release, right? So, it's all of these juxtapositions happen where he's kind of community or we're only hearing this from beyond Tupac's grave, yet he's still describing a world where he was living in like a life he longed to experience, and also got a chance to experience what I'm saying, like. JP: So, it's an interesting it's an interesting piece. It's an interesting piece.

Joël: [00:22:44] So I got a question, and I don't know which one of you are going to be brave enough to answer it. But JP, based on what you're saying and based on that conversation, um, or what we're talking about, Tupac is talking about. Life. Current life. Right. Whereas he was writing it. Not now he's dead, but it's part of the current life that we're looking at, also looking towards the future. My belief is that. Each of us, each of us here, and each person who has any kind of faith in, you know, a higher, higher divine power, right? What I call God. If we're made. In the image of God, or we have that divinity within us. I think part of the call that we have is to start to bring that heaven, that. It's talked about an end. On an everyday basis so that we can feel it and then others can feel it, right? Like a positive change we're trying to bring to this, this world that we call home. Right? Um, is that what you think Tupac was doing there in his writing?

JP: [00:24:02] Oh for sure. Well, I think I think this is what artists do, right? Nipsey Hussle has this this clip where he's talking about artists and he's talking about words, people in particular.

Right? There's a bevy of types of artistry. But he saw my words, people. He saw this concept of bringing it down. Right. It's like we're.

Gogoh: [00:24:19] Bringing it down.

JP: [00:24:20] Because we're going to a place where it exists up here, and we're having this conversation up here with whatever's up there, and we're bringing it down and translating it and communicating with other folks who can access it in our communicative processes. Right. So like, I think artistry, um, people who are creating from scratch, people who are creating from nothing, that's a process of that, right? Where we're bringing it down, whether we call it heaven, whether we call it the afterlife, whether we call it another realm, whatever we're calling you, there's this thing that exists. There's this place of space, whatever we want to call it. There's this thing that exists that, from my understanding, creators access. And I think all of us have access to being creators. Um, speaking of being made in the image of God, right? Like we're creators, we were created and we can create, um, but we can also bring it down. We can go up there and go to that place and bring it down for all of us to be able to access. And sometimes that's imagination, sometimes that's lyrics, sometimes that's, you know, um, any kind of experience of where, like translating for one another in a, in a creative sense, I think Tupac is absolutely doing I think he did that throughout his, throughout his work and throughout his body of work. You know what I'm saying? I think that he was able to access that. And that's what resonated. I think what resonated was the fact that he was accessing something that that other people knew or understood, even if they weren't the ones bringing it down themselves. Um, they had access to understand it. And that's what resonated. So yeah, for sure, you know, and like. I think folks like Tupac. I think, you know, folks who are or who have the access to bringing it down, we're required to do that work because that's what progresses how we're actually living on Earth.

JP: [00:26:05] Right? Like, even if it's radical, even if it's something that's like way beyond the normal, the normal mode of operation. Right? Like, I talk about this when I talk about because I'm an abolitionist, right. Um, I'm like, that's a pretty radical thing right now. Right? Still, especially now, actually, after we kind of post post black post black Lives Matter. But it feels like it sometimes. But like, you know, when you talk about abolishing police, that sounds radical. It's like, how are we going to do that? I have family members. We're like, well, how am I going to make sure that I don't get I'm like, this police aren't stopping you getting robbed anyway. Like, let's think beyond this, right? Let's let's think beyond this. And it's like that's going to that type of push. That type of radical push is often what brings us to a place of progression, right? Like we need the people who are pushing the envelope so radically, so out of the, so out of the world, so out of out of order that we can move any, any, at any point. Right. So I think parkour is definitely one of those people. Um. And we can see it in his work. It's all. It's written all over it. It's all in there. It's all in the text. It's all in the presentation. It's all in how you actually presented it. And. And with how he resonated and how he made an impact.

Joël: [00:27:14] Aaron is an artist, and Aaron has spoken up on here from his perspective as a as a fellow artist.

Aaron: [00:27:25] Thank you Joe. Um. Now, yeah. Um, this particular song for me was very theopoetic in the sense of, um, Tupac being an archetype of Christ, like Jesus Yeshua and, um,

definitely trying to deliver this message through this ministry of, um, doing rap, but really trying to bring, like you said, divine information from the top, from the highest point in the mountain, um, down to the lowest part of the valley, you know, biblically. And so. When we're talking about Thugz Mansion, we're talking about like, this community aspect. You know, the kingdom, you know, and it's interesting because Yeshua or Jesus wasn't talking afterlife. The whole time. It was the now, the present. And so, you know, it's so interesting for us to see Tupac do a song like this and attempt to have people imagine there's a place for you, regardless of what Empire or, you know, the government says about you. You know, so it's like you're seeing this biblical story play out in real time. And yet it wasn't until he died that people paid attention more, you know? And so this is also an echo of artists all around. You know, artists rarely are listened to or understood when they're living.

Aaron: [00:29:15] Unfortunately, the poetry is that when they're gone, that's when people start to really look into it. And the same could be said about Yeshua. Jesus, like an actual religion, was made 70 odd years, 100 years displaced from his lynching in the first century. So, you know, again, it's never when they're alive, you know, and I think that's a bittersweetness as an artist. Um, and any artist who's listening, you know, um, we in a Christian way, uh, carry our cross daily. You know, any time we imagine, daydream or feel inspired to create, you know, that's a push back against, you know, elements or symbols like empire, uh, binary structures, colonialism, colonizing, uh, aspects. And so it's not meant to be glorified, nor will it really be glorified. Um, I think it just becomes something of a whisper of inspiration for future artists, you know, to pick up. And, um, we just wanted to say we love what you said. Um, JP, about being an abolitionist. And that's a very powerful statement. And for you to publicly make that claim. It says a lot. Even to this conversation. So thank you.

JP: [00:31:00] Yeah for sure. Definitely abolitionist. There's a lot of abolitionist I'm in community with. And, um, the Terme abolitionist is chosen on purpose. Uh. Because of obviously, the lineage of abolition and. How we relate to it in terms of its historical context with the system of slavery. And abolishing that system, which also was very normalized in a way that I think people don't realize. Parallel in some ways to the police system. The system is surveillance now. Um, but yeah. Well, I did want to, uh, respond to just what you were sharing and just, uh, in terms of time and the poets and prophets not being. Recognize in the time, which is true. Uh, I also I also offer that this is where. Afrofuturism, um, and to some degree and to some degree Christianity. Oddly enough, with with those. With those, uh. Beliefs, spaces help in that regard. Um, this time is not linear, right? Like that's the belief in Afrofuturism. Like the time is not necessarily linear, even in Christianity. Right? Where? Now granted, we only in Christianity there's a narrow maybe mindset towards only Jesus having this existence, but the the idea exist in we can extrapolate from it that, uh, Jesus still lives, right? Like even after Jesus is dead, Jesus still lives. So to me, that's ground for, you know, that's precedent for the time is not linear.

JP: [00:32:38] And I would extend that to the way black folks access ancestry and the way that timelessness operates, especially with creative things. Right. Like things that get created sometimes have a timelessness to them. Um, and the creators of those things sometimes can have life before and after they're living. Um, or at least they're. Bodily living. So, uh, you know, I don't there's plenty. I don't know about that, but there's a lot that resonates with me about. The

concept or the availability. That time is not is not linear and. When Tupac was walking the earth in flesh. You may not have understood these types of concepts. And these like this song wasn't even released when it was around, right? But, uh, but there's still something to be said about understanding and timelessness and whether or not Tupac had access to that understanding. I don't know, you know, like. I think about Lauryn Hill with this, too. Um. Any honestly, any artist who I think is prophetic, especially music artists. I'm talking about the lane of music artistry, right? Where, um. Both say things and do things and live away, and sometimes they're not remembered in their own time for those things that they're doing that is prophetic. And sometimes they don't get hurt at all in their own time for being prophetic. Right? Um. I feel like I can talk about this all day long.

JP: [00:34:16] And I mentioned two people. Uh, actually, I mentioned one person, so I could just kind of go crazy in my mind here. Um, one is Sixto Rodriguez, who? I don't know if folks are familiar with Sixto. It was a documentary about him. I don't know if it's still available, but it's on Netflix called searching for Sugar Man. Uh, there's actually a circuit, uh, element to this, which I'll hopefully I remember. And I also, on second, searching for Sugar Man, Sixto Rodriguez was, uh, a soul artist. And like the 60s, I think it was from Detroit, this Mexican cat. And he did a lot of anti-war, anti-imperialism music. And he was signed to a record label called Sussex Records, which was owned by Clarence Avon. And they made this record, and he's very mysterious and has this shadowy figure on the album cover and has all this kind of like, I mean, honestly, it sounds like kind of sounds like Bob Dylan, like that's kind of a comparable artistry, right? Um, but he's a person of color and he's coming from Detroit, and he has a different perspective on the world, and he's talking about anti-apartheid and anti-war and all this other thing. Um, so they released this record, and it flops in the U.S. doesn't nobody hears it. Nobody heard of it.

JP: [00:35:32] You know, Sixto goes on to like working the factories in Detroit and never really kind of be heard or seen from in the United States context, really. Meanwhile. In South Africa. He's bigger than the Beatles. Sussex records did notice clearance. Avon didn't notice. Sixto Rodriguez didn't notice he was banned. He was banned in South Africa for having the lyrics that he had, and that obviously put fuel on the fire for his popularity in South Africa. So he becomes the voice of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa in the 70s. Nobody knows it, though. There's no internet, there's no quick communication. The world wasn't as globalized as we know it to be, our understanding to do now. So he's blowing up in South Africa, the voice of a movement, right? Granted, he does live to see the day when he finds this out because somebody does some tracking and they figure out how to find the guy. And this is long after Sussex Records folds and six is no longer a practicing professional musician. But I think in the 90s it was like they find everything out and the searching for Sugar Man, they were searching for this guy. They're like, what? What ever happened to the guy who was like the face of our movement in South Africa? They find him. He ends up doing a tour of South Africa, and it's like everybody knows all the lyrics.

JP: [00:36:54] It's like it looks crazy because nobody knows who this dude is in the U.S. but in South Africa, he's huge. And to me, it's such a fascinating. Example of. Time and time being linear and like understanding where it happens. Other worlds, parallel universes. It's like a really trippy thing that happened with this, with this cat. Um, and the full circle thing is that I was

gonna bring it back to Tupac because. The other version of Thugz Mansion. With Tupac Is with is features NAS and NAS samples Sixto Rodriguez in the song called Stillmatic. So Sugar Man, there's a uh. And it was a clean sample too, because on the NAS they go, you're done that, you're done that, you're done, man. But it's actually sugar man. Sugar like Sixto was singing Sugar Man. So it's a crazy sample that's like a deep cut and like, what are we what are we doing here? Like, there's all these these things swirling around that, that that combine and that connect. And, uh, I just want to share that story because it was one of the great stories I know of that speak to this concept of understanding time, impact and meaning. And it's like, I have more questions than answers, but I offer it because it feels. Make it make sense.

Gogoh: [00:38:23] Um, I was aware of the Cito Rodriguez, um, story, for one. I was aware of the sample with NAS. And, you know, you're the man versus sugar man. But also, if back to thug, thug mentioned, if you listen closely in the song with respect to artists being. Abolitionists being revolutionary, being challenging, forcing change. He brings up Marvin Gaye, Billie Holiday, Jackie Wilson, Sam Cooke, Malcolm Miles Davis. You know, so you can see where Tupac was already transcending the physical realm and understanding. You know what he is reaching up, reaching out, bringing down whatever information he has. Because he saw it in these people. These people were examples of it from before. He was even, you know, conceived. So the parallel is there where you see where you see his unearthly being. Communing with these other unearthly beings, understanding that they are in the same realm, and trying to bring down something for us who are still down here, you know, to grab a little piece of because I still don't think we can we can discuss this song for 3 or 4 days and continually find new information, because there is no way you can fully grasp not just what he was saying, but you can't fully grasp what it means when you really, really sit down and say, oh, because there are songs I listen to from like the 90s that I'm still hearing different things in today. You know, not just Tupac, not just biggie, not just NAS or whatever, but just random songs because you hear things differently based on how you feel, where you are, what you're going through. But then as you start to transcend, so does your understanding. And then that understanding, if you play it back, opens up different portals in your mind and in your ear, then you really, really start to understand again just a portion of what the artist was trying to convey. But yeah, I like that.

Aaron: [00:40:24] Yeah. You also brought up in our mind this idea that, um, Thugz Mansion is a timeless concept and that theologically is, you know, profound, right? Because then Thug Mansion is not what the average Christian understands heaven to be. Then, you know, it kind of just completely separates from that. And it says, you know, Thugz Mansion is more than that, a lot more. You know, it's not just an absolute place. It's a place that's continuously in process, you know, and that's what makes it so timeless. Right? It's an endless process. Um, so it's interesting that, you know, we come to this kind of thought of perceiving Thugz Mansion beyond just a physical mansion or an economical perspective of someone considered poor is now having something of wealth, you know, like there's so many dimensions to that thug mansion. But theologically, you know, you can see this underlying. Prophetic, uh, attempt to make people think differently about what a Thugz Mansion would even look like. You know, I think a lot of us immediately just jump to the conclusion that a Thugz Mansion was what we couldn't afford. I want the nicest of the nicest. I want that clean looking like, you know, Fresh Prince of Bel Air mansion or something. You know, like, I'm sure we all had these kind of symbols and images in our mind, like, yeah, you know, it's just a mansion where we could do where we want, you

know? But when we sit down and really, you know, go deep on this, it's like, damn, maybe it's so much more than that. Maybe it's a lot simpler. You know what I mean? Like, maybe we're missing it. Maybe it's like Thugz Mansion is me chilling in my condo or my apartment, making my bills, you know, putting food on the table for my kids. You know, maybe that's the serenity that we're looking for. Maybe that's the peace, the calmness we're looking for. You know, maybe not just trying to keep up with the man with their flashy things, you know?

JP: [00:42:44] That's so good, right? Because I think that speaks to the profundity of the record. Because it is it is simple things, right? Like a lot of this, he's not necessarily naming complex things. He's even in this diverse theme Gogoh mentioned. He's like, so see the show. Marvin Gaye that's not complex right? Like it's complex because it's time travel, right. Like we're listening to this in 2023 talking about Tupac and what, 97 talking about seeing a show of Marvin Gaye, who passed away 30 years prior to that. That's crazy right? That's super complex. When you boil it down and it's like, I saw a show last night that's like, not that crazy, right? Like drinking peppermint, Jackie Wilson and Sam Cooke like. It's not that crazy. That's not that's a simple thing. And that's I think that's the that's the fascinating thing about. The imagination of heaven, right? Because it is at once something so simple, like you're saying something so easy, but at once it's like it's not at the same time. And that's part of why that's part of how we see oppression. Because it's like, how hard is it to just let me sit here and smoke? How hard is it to just let me sit here and chill with your homies on the block? Why is it so hard to do that? Right? Like it shouldn't be that difficult. Like when you boil it down. These were super complex concepts and ideas are not that hard, but then they are at the same time. And that's what to me, that's what's so profound about. You know what poets can capture how artists can capture this juxtaposition. But also, just like the concept itself,

Joël: [00:44:21] I want to I want to say what my Thugz Mansion looks like, right? And then I'm going to ask all of you to go. Maybe we could do it. Alphabetical order. So, Aaron, that means you go next. Um. My Thugz Mansion.

Joël: [00:44:40] Its simple yet difficult, right? The first thing is it's a place where I could be my whole self. Right where I don't have to hide. Any parts of myself. I don't have to hide any parts of myself from my own self, which I do because of the society I live in, right? Like I just want to be a place where I can be my whole self. I think it's a place that looks like. Um, where me? As a black man in a black body. I'm worth more than my ability to work, my ability to earn income, my sexual prowess. Like any, like where I could just be like a human being for me. Another place. And it it probably not like that, but a place like a place where I could, like, really just be praising God. Sometimes in the shower I hear, like a song or a hymn or something that does it. Like I was telling Aaron a couple of days ago, I was listening to biggie. I was listening to juicy and like the theological aspects, like just came together for me. At the same time, I wanted to be a place where I could, you know, just like be like all Pentecostal, praising God, right? With, um, some Henny like, like Tupac says, or some Haitian rum, some like 35 year old Haitian rum or 60 year old Haitian rum.

Joël: [00:46:13] Just chilling, playing spades like cracking jokes. Look your woman's fat ass that walks by and not being ashamed of it. I want all those things. I want all those things in my husband being able to say, hey, wife, look at that. Doesn't that look nice? And not getting in

trouble. And most of all. Um, Tupac says something about tattoos, and we talk about another song that tattoos. My first ever tattoo that I got was when I was a teenager. I was 19, 18, something like that. And, and, um. I went and got a tattoo. Back then it was the age to be doing like Chinese symbols and stuff like that of love. Because like, I've always been anchored. And what drew me, drew me to religion, Christianity and God was that agapē love ethic. And that's what I want most in my Thugz Mansion. A place to have that abundantly.

Aaron: [00:47:22] That's beautiful. Um, and that's a real eye for me. A part of me believes I'm already in my Thugz Mansion. Um. We have such a privilege, you know, in so many aspects of our life. Um. I think the only thing to add to this experience that would make it, you know, very, uh, promising would be, uh. You know, the steady supply of wheat. You know I hate when my jar gets low. You know what I'm saying? Like I'm simple, but, you know, I got a roof over my head. I could put food on the table for my kids and family. I got gas in the car. You know what I mean? I got the heat. I got good water. You know, like, these are the things that really makes my Thugz Mansion. You know, I got books. I love my books. You know, maybe it'd be nice to have, like, a endless spending limit, you know, to just buy books, you know, that would. That would be so dope. But, no, seriously, um. I really can't complain. I feel like I'm living in my Thugz Mansion and it's kind of underdevelopment, so to speak. You know, I'm doing some improvements, some additions, you know, piece by piece, you know? So, um, we're definitely in this daydreaming mode of figuring out how to make our life not just better for ourselves, but for others who are part of it, too. You know that communal aspect.

Gogoh: [00:49:08] Nice, Aaron. See what we can do about that jar. Keep it from getting empty. Um, my Thugz Mansion. I'm at a point in my life where I think anything I do, everything I do is, is about my last two kids. Like the act of breathing. I'm trying to figure out in all my thought processes, it's about what can I do? Not so much to make life easier for them, but to make life fair. What I've come to realize is that I don't want to give them more than your kids have. I want them to have equal opportunity to everything that your kids have. Um, and I want all kids to have parities when I'm looking for and I it's I don't look at my thug mansion as, as something or some place for me anymore because I'm, I'm past the point where I'm looking for anything, um, I'm hoping for and I'm praying for a situation where a lot of what we all have gone through will not affect them, where homelessness could never be an option. Where? The empty jar. If that's how how they go is not. A possibility. Um, and it's not because I will prevent it, but they will have the wherewithal and they will have all that they need to have all that they need. I personally don't don't necessarily care what my kids choose to do with their lives as long as they're happy. But I want that happiness to be a reflection of whatever I could do in my Thugz Mansion to make it possible for them.

Gogoh: [00:50:46] If I am to say what my thug mansion looks like, it's the ability for me and for them and for all of us to come and go as we please, do as we want to do. Live how we want to live. Um. And just mind our business and drink our water. Really? Like I. And I don't understand why life cannot be that simple. I'm not bothering you. So why must you come here to bother me? You know, if you're coming here, bring the Rahim. Yeah, bring the rum. You know, bring a reason for us to, you know, to seek, to get to know each other a little better. You know, don't come here to bring congestion, to bring strife and grief. Come here to figure out how we can level the playing field or make another field. You know, I'm just I'm at that point where all this

stuff doesn't matter. It's what? What's coming after it. You know, how we. You know, and I don't like to use the word legacy, but what are we. Why are we here? If you're not going to leave the place better, then why are you here? I mean, I hope that made sense. It's kind of a little off topic, but y'all know my head ain't wrapped too tight anyway, so.

JP: [00:51:57] Y'all are offering some very impressive images here. I think what I would share is my at least in a theoretical I have a I guess I have a theoretical sense of this and a practical sense of this, a theoretical sense of. Of my thugs mentioned. Would actually be. In a paradoxical way. Uh. A complete demolished necessity to have to imagine a third dimension. If that makes sense. Um. To let go of or to detach from the desire to imagine a Thugz Mansion. It's what the Thugz Mansion look like for me. That's theoretical. Um, practically speaking, it feels like actually not in a home at all. Not in a mansion, not in a physical space. It would be. Um, some return to nature. Um. It would probably look like something that is highly, highly developed and sophisticated, but also. Very bare minimum when it comes to like technology or.

JP: [00:53:17] Um.

JP: [00:53:17] Addiction to social media or external validation. Um. It would look like. An engagement with and creation of beauty without desire of possessing it. Um. It would look like painting. It would look like, uh, making instruments out of trees and plants and playing them just for the clouds. Uh. While at the same time in community, wrapped up in people and water and clearings and brushes and, uh, streams and rocks, uh, and gatherings and good food, well spiced with good as we I mean, it's a through line, but good weed and good liquor, um, the spiritual elements of those things. Uh. Yeah. That's what that's what it would look like, you know.

Joël: [00:54:20] Thank you so much. Thank you so much. I don't think we need to add too much more to this. I do want to say though, uh, JP, I hope that. You enjoyed being with us and you might decide to come around again. Um, I just want to say this this, um, the podcast, the Hip Hop in Theology podcast. I'm going to include it in my, um, DMin project.

JP: [00:54:50] Oh, nice.

Joël: [00:54:51] And, um, I am writing about the decolonization of the black church. So decolonize how we can go about decolonizing it. Um, and then, of course, how do we build it back up? Right. Um, so we'll get there. And. I try to do the sermon route like go, go preach at the churches. That didn't work too well for me. I figured I already had this podcast going on. See what happens if we do it through this. We had a lot of people reach out to us in the last maybe two years or so. Like how much this was church for them. They didn't like going to church. They didn't enjoy it, but they found a connection to the divine through this, because the music that you know, that they grew up with or listened to or loved, also going to teach an online class and do a minister's Bible study and we'll see which one is more successful and all that's going into the project. So I just want you to know that hopefully you'll be back on if you want to. I don't know. I'll hit you up. See if you're interested in anything else. Thank you so much.

JP: [00:56:07] Yeah, I was going to just say, yeah, you know, just let me know. Uh, this is right up my alley. Uh, my, my, my artistry is deeply informed by my life. My lives, uh, in, you know,

in ministry in the traditional sense, in, in education, um, and in social justice spaces. So just right up my alley, you know, uh, my, it looks very different than what I thought it would look like, and that's a blessing. I'll just say it that way. Uh, I'm not where I thought it would be. And I'm very glad I'm here. Uh, you know what I'm saying? So, uh. Yeah. I'm here. I'm a resource. I love to tap in, plug in. These conversations always bring me life. I like to contribute to them and share the perspective. So yeah, you know, you know, man, you got my numbers and links. You know on that.

Joël: [00:56:54] Yeah. Thanks a lot man I appreciate it, I really appreciate it.

Prayer

Hip-Hop & Theology: "Prayer"

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Joël: [00:00:00] Welcome to Hip Hop and Theology, a space of theological and decolonizing thoughts that attempts to increase humanity through the theo-poetics of hip hop and theology. I'm excited to get into today's dialogue. Let's get into it. It's great to be back. We have a special guest with us today, kid. Lacey. Let me introduce Kid Lacey. Lacey is a self-proclaimed Renaissance man. And a self-inspired hip hop artist based in Brooklyn, New York. Originally from Westchester, Lacey attended the NYU Tisch Clive Davis Institute of Recorded Music. It's a long name to study creative music, entrepreneurship, and performance. A multi-hyphenate, Lacey is also a singer songwriter, a DJ, a producer. A curator, an engineer, a visual artist, and a long form writer, creative consultant, and an indie A&R. As an MC and lyricist, The Kid is primarily recognized for his clever punchlines, subtle nuances, and intellectual provocations through word. Lisa is two years removed from the release of his debut project. Don't Write Me Off. I'm going to

plug, plug his information so you guys can go and listen to him. He's good. Really good. Since then, he's been organically growing his brand, providing features, creating immersive music videos. Now, though, there's an anticipation for Kid Lacey's next solo effort. Right now, he will be an integral part of the upcoming spring release from the “111 collective” in Crown Heights. So be on the lookout for that. You can find kid Lacy at W-w-w-what. Kid Lacey, kidlacey.com. You can find him at kid Lacy underscore, and you can find them on Twitter at Lacy eyes. Eyes e-y-e-s. Do you want to hear the song one time before we start?

Kid Lacey: [00:02:16] Um, I mean, I say, why not? I say, why not? Just one more time through.

Rick Ro$$: [00:02:27] Psalm 27. Whom shall I be afraid? And before I wrap up, this part of. They stumble and fail. There wasn't here to watch this come to pass. Encamp against me. My heart shall not fear. Since I can't do shit else. The war.

Rick Ro$$: [00:03:03] This was 12 years in the making. No side deals with Satan. I'm dealing with the makers straight up. A lot of homies ask, what's a prayer? A prayer is what's in it for 12 years? Well, a prayer is what saved me. I should have been indicted. Now my kids know Jesus.

Rick Ro$$: [00:03:26] Cut the air I fell in. A prayer is like medicine. It'll heal wounds. Axe bush veterans make holes in the sides. What would it feel like? For the dividends alone. My sins. Forgive me one. Christ with the Friel. Dear Lord, here I. I swear to God, I've done some things in the past. If I could. Please, Lord, I.

Rick Ro$$: [00:04:14] Hope you bring them back. I feel pain, man, cause I can't speak on it. That's why I got so many songs.

Rick Ro$$: [00:04:21] I can't sleep, homie. Damn tattoo's for forgiveness. I might not get it, but forgive me. I'm here and I'm fighting.

Rick Ro$$: [00:04:30] Like a motherfucker. Motherfucker. Triple C excited like a motherfucker.

Rick Ro$$: [00:04:35] Say a prayer. Put the weed in the air. Thank God once again for making me a millionaire. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Rick Ro$$: [00:04:45] I thank God for making me a millionaire.

Rick Ro$$: [00:05:03] This would give me one great song to play. Two tags on the. Cross study with the Sevai. He is being lauded right now. I used to.

Rick Ro$$: [00:05:16] Get stacks off the whole zone. Now I'm back to back covers for the old zone. He made a magazine billboard. Going strong. Rolling in the Phantom with muthafuckin rolling. Then you stuck with me through thick and thin.

Rick Ro$$: [00:05:32] Sittin back got your mama sitting in the Benz. Lord make you damn near wanna cry. No.

Rick Ro$$: [00:05:39] Pass that money like homicide.

Rick Ro$$: [00:05:42] A little after midnight. Is he's trying to get right. It's bloodshed after midnight.

Rick Ro$$: [00:05:52] This is Ross and his coach trying to get.

Rick Ro$$: [00:06:05] Give a kiss, dear Lord. Here. I repeat my sins. Forgive me. One great song to play. A small crash turkey with a slim. Dividends. They're loaded, right?

Joël: [00:06:26] Thank you. Thank you. Aaron.

Joël: [00:06:30] You know. This song came at a very appropriate time in my life. Uh, especially now. So. Let's just get into it. Let's just get into it. Um, I'll tell you. I'll tell you why it's appropriate for me. And I'm dropping this on you, man. Yeah. Recently I had two members of my family kidnapped. And. Like it's not like kidnapping. Asking for. You know, the half $1 million kind of kidnapping. Not the, come with like $5,000 and we'll let them go. So, for me and my family, I think all we've really been able to do. Is stay in prayer. For a lot of us in my family, we're connected to music, so listening to something like that is a prayer for me itself. I identify with so much of the lyrics. Um. So, I'm happy. This is like a great, great time for me to kind of process, process my feelings, my emotions, and find some inner peace through. What I've been taught as a child, and what I often go against is prayer.

Kid Lacey: [00:07:48] No, that's insanely interesting. I mean, well, one, I'm definitely sorry to hear you know about all of that. That sounds overwhelming. And honestly, at a, in a in a bit like surreal. Um, just to have a situation like that, you know, thrown into your life and now you have to kind of deal with that. Um, but I do agree, you know, with just like the sentiment of, of. Finding peace within prayer. And, uh, I guess, like how, um. How much it takes to get there; you know what I mean? I think and to me, it through all of that, obviously I don't necessarily, um, you know, relate in 1 to 1 experience. But, you know, when you talk about your situation currently, but when you speak about something that you go against and the fact that it's kind of like, you know, something that your mother taught you, but you're still learning how to pray, right? You know what I mean? Um, that honestly makes me feel good because I'm obviously still in the mix of learning how to do it right and learning how to do it for me. And I guess just reconciling with what is a prayer, you know, to me? Um, it's interesting.

Joël: [00:09:02] I don't think there's any way to do it right. Man, I really don't, I think so this is a lot of my education coming out. I think we've been taught a very calm, nice way to communicate with the divine right. Right. And we got to break that cycle. I think that's why this hip hop and theology podcast is so important, and why this song is so important. You know, you look at most people, I look at my family, right? And not my generation, but the older generations. A lot of them are going to see like a person like Rick Ross or me. If it's my family with my locks the way it is, even though it's done coming from a Caribbean, Caribbean background, and stuff like that, and just be like, oh, this, this person, it's not even this person has like, no kind of faith at all. It's almost what it gets to. Mhm. And I think it's important that. We put these kinds of messages out

there to show people. This Puritan Christianity that a lot of us, if you're Christian because Aaron, you ain't Christian, but a lot of a lot of not even Christianity, a lot of these Puritan religious traditions that we practice have us in a box, have tried to put us in a mold which we need to break. Because for me, God is so much bigger.

Aaron: [00:10:27] Thank you for that. You're right. The song itself is kind of conflicting, right? Because the artist, the artist is image, and the artist is background. Conflicting with something that has been absorbed by religion and religion through doctrine dictates what that means. You know, I mean, we even see in the Bible an attempt to tell us how to pray, you know, and then religion over time takes that very seriously and then develops more in-depth doctrine and practices. That then goes deeper into this is exactly what you have to say. For me, it's as a shaman and journey that really just allowed me to step out of religion, you know, temporarily and kind of start thinking about all these things. You know, we thought of prayer as like a key to a door. And we thought that in order to possess this key, you had to say certain words specifically. But it's not even like that. You know, now that we are stepped out of religion and we're journeying into ourselves, you know, learning more about ourselves, you know, we start realizing that relationship dynamic changes. God is not just in the sky or God is not just that door that we have a specific key to, but God is so much more like you said Joel.

Aaron: [00:11:50] Powerful yet scary at the same time because we wanted to add, most times we're praying because we're in distress. And that right there makes us think that, you know, we have to pray a certain kind of way. It's like trying to get that combination lock and we're frantic, you know, we're trying to get inside and it's just like, damn, what's the code? You know? And you know, you have a specific religion saying, well, it's this specific code language words, you know, and if you plug that in that door will open for you. But we're starting to see right now in the early 21st century that's not working. And people are very frantic. And they're asking, you told me it's this code and I'm still not getting it. Like, what does that mean? You know, so this whole idea of prayer then has to evolve and has to change. You know, so Rick Ross talking about prayer is that step hip hop talking about prayer is that step into a different way, a way that allows everybody to gain access, you know, not just when you're frantic, but when you're safe.

Joël: [00:13:03] You know what I yes, yes. And just go to the lyrics. I just go to lyrics. Right. And but what he says. Right. We're talking about. Stumbling and troubles and all that kind of stuff that he's gone through, people have gone through. The first thing he says, since they can't do shit else, I'm gonna say a prayer. I think that's where a lot of people fall. I think it's a great thing, and I think it kind of something we need to change. Like you just said, Aaron a little bit as well, because my, my, what I've seen with prayer and my family specifically is doing this type of prayer now, right? Shit is going on like, fuck it. What the fuck is happening? I'm going to pray. I'm going to pray. But we got to do different types of prayer too, right? Like prayer is a conversation. And it's moved from a conversation to just. I don't mean to say it in a bad way when I say this, but it's like begging God for like. Special gifts or whatever it is, right? Um. You know. You go to war. Both sides are praying to God and then whoever wins is going to say, Oh God did this. From my understanding of God and Aaron.

Joël: [00:14:40] You, you're a little bit different. I skew very loving towards God. So, my understanding of God is God is loving God. Now why God gonna be like and this is this is taking

out the Old Testament stuff. Because if you go to the first part of the Bible, we got a God that is wrathful. So, I with the wrath of God, I gotta learn that raffle. God, I want the God that going to bring me some peace, some joy. You know what? I forgot her name, but she is a. She was a seminarian. And a woman is that kind of just got tired of life. There was so much and found out she needed rest. And one of the things she says is God is an orgasm. God is in pleasure. So, this is my God. Every time I speak to God, I wish I had an orgasm, baby. Let's, let's something like that. Like, well, no, that's too far. But. I feel God is a very powerful, loving entity that is within each of us that we could pull up. So even in the prayers, I think a lot of prayers. We have to go inside of ourselves to that divinity within ourselves and reconnect back to that original source, to God.

Kid Lacey: [00:16:18] I agree. I mean and I think like to like earlier to piggyback on what Aaron was saying about, um, this more transparent, more, uh, decentralized doctrine of prayer. Um, like, I definitely I definitely agree that this is that and like, as just, you know, an emcee and a lyricist, like the first thing that I did generally was just try to pick apart like some of the lyrics and just, you know, kind of get, get the, get the gist of like what he's saying and where he's coming from. Um, and then so to what you're saying, Joel, about, um, like. About you having to go inside of yourself and kind of find you and kind of, uh. Connect with your God or your version of God or your version of this, this exuberant. Um, force of love and whatnot. Um, it can take many different shapes and forms, and I think that's obvious in this because and Aaron had noted it too, that this is contradictory in a sense of a peace. When you have somebody like Rick Ross, somebody who, you know, speaks so much about. Kind of like criminal activity, you know what I mean? Which is funny, which is funny as somebody who worked as a as a parole officer, you know, that, like certain things like that, but, you know, that's just, um, when it comes to perception, no matter if he did that, no matter if he does, that speaks on that, whatnot.

Kid Lacey: [00:17:54] This still can be 100% true, because for the most part, the prayer and I know somebody said this, but the prayers is it. It should be a conversation, you know, rather than a wish list of can I get this? Can I get that? Bless me for this, save me for that. You know, this and that. So, I do want to talk about it because I do. I found that like in the hook that he kind of does that a little bit, kind of then does the wizard, what did he say? Uh, keep me alive, keep me out of jail, take care of the kids, take care of the family. You know, thank you for making me a millionaire. You know, essentially, like some of them things I'm here for. Some of them things you know, I'm not. Because I feel like. You know, you shouldn't. You can't. You can't speak on it in your conversation with God. But keeping yourself out of jail, I mean, to a certain extent, you can't. You know, the government is crazy. So, you can't always be, you know, in control. But like, keeping your kids, you know, uh, taking care of, keeping your family in check, that should be, you know, kind of enacted through your own action, you know, if anything. So, I found that a little, like I was a little critical of it.

Kid Lacey: [00:19:05] But then going into the verses, I'm like, I can't be critical of none of this, because this now this is your story. This is your prayer. You know what I mean? So, I find it's interesting, like I go right into it as a music head, thinking I'm gonna be like a critic and start to critique and whatnot. Um, but the biggest thing I'm just trying to do is like, attack, like, figure out where I stand with the story, you know? Um, and so it didn't snap on to me because I don't, you know, I don't live the life that Ross did even not even as a matter of like, oh, criminal

activity, this, and that. Um, really just a matter of the, the level of struggle. Like I spoke, I typed down, like, a few insights and like, he speaks a lot about struggle. So, like, it's clear that in his prayer, like God has helped, you know, deliver him, you know, from where he's been, and he's transcended and moved on and whatnot. Um, but like or not, but, um, and, you know, I'm kind of just trying to like. I guess figure out how I feel about that. But it's not my space to then I it's really not my space to have an ending or like a closing thought. It kind of just is what it is, you know?

Joël: [00:20:17] Yeah, I understand you. I, I agree with what you're saying and then I, I start I started to think back, thinking about like, not the hook so much, but. His prayer, his commentary, the verses themselves. And I went back like I grew up with some privilege. But I also grew up in the hood. So, like when he talks about. Uh, you know. I'm sure I done some stuff that I might have been indicted for, but nothing like huge. But when he talks about, um, like bullets going through the air and, you know, almost getting hit and stuff like that, that's definitely happened to me. Um, prayer like medicine. That's another thing that definitely hit home for me. Um, I don't I'm going to bring your dad up just for this section. Um. Like I had seizures because of an unknown tumor since I was 18 and. Like I did everything, like the best specialist, you know, like herbal medicine, like whatever, whatever it was. Seizures never stopped. I prayed, I people were praying, like all that stuff. Um. It was like my eighth surgery, and I was about to go in. I had like part of my brain removed where the tumor was, I had infection, I had part of my skull removed, like a whole bunch of other stuff, a whole bunch of complications. And, um, the last time I was about to go in, I was, I think I was going into surgery on Tuesday. I went to church on Sunday. I asked your dad to pray for me. Your dad was praying. I was praying for myself as well. And this is one of the times when I went inside and like, I knew like the prayer was medicine, because through all the struggles, through everything I'd been through.

Joël: [00:22:29] I knew that I was healed during that prayer, and that's the last time I had surgery. Like I didn't have to go through with. So, for some of these things, depending on what you go through. You know, people might say it's luck. People might say it's wishful thinking. I go down to. You know, like my biblical roots. Like, if you have a mustard seed of faith, that's all you really need. And sometimes you need to grow that mustard seed. You need to grow to that point. But for that instance, I had it. And before I went in, I knew it was done. And I have had to go back in for any kind of brain surgeries or nothing like that. It's been like 6 or 7 years. So, you know, like. For me, for me and I, I lack I don't pray as often as I should write, um, or I pray much real differently, but I need to do it more often because sometimes, like my prayer is just, I sit down and meditate. I try to be one with the spirit. I try to listen and that's it. Like I I'm not repeating. You know. Hail Mary. Our father. I or when you go to church like you have like, protocol to follow. A lot of people do that in their lives instead of having conversation, listening. So, I think this is this is it. And this is Rick Ross like conversation. Right. So, I know I went off on a tangent, but that's where it broke me.

Kid Lacey: [00:24:12] No, no, I mean, I think that's the I completely agree. Like I think that's exactly it. Like this is Ross's, you know, meditation is version of meditation or, you know, his prayer more. So um, and I think it's just like, interesting because you made a point that you said you might, though I may not do it the right way or like or you said I do it a very different way. But even in the midst of like how you pray, um, like that just made me think of the fact that like,

the how doesn't matter. It's really you said, but I know I need to do it more. You know, it's like the frequency. It's like the, um. The routine ness of doing something like that and holding space to have a conversation, whether that means you're doing a lot of talking or whether that means you're doing a lot of listening. Um, like, I definitely agree with that. Like I agree with that. More so as somebody who needs to pray as well. Um, you know, but not as somebody, but like I need to like, watch myself, like, before I critique the way I pray or I like something doesn't happen and I'm like, oh, I'm not praying, right? Or whatever. Like, all I really, you know, you just bring up a good point and all I really need to do is do it in abundance, you know, do it in in consistency. You know, I think that that's key because I feel like it's easy to it's easy to, um. Fall off, you know, and to talk yourself out of praying. To be honest, it's crazy. Yeah.

Joël: [00:25:51] You know what? Um, my wife and I have been talking about Christianity some versus some of the other. Religious practices and. Perhaps and not only and not Christians, but I think more as people we've lost some aspect of ritual. And you know how I'm against ritual, right, Aaron? Like stand up, sit down in church. We got five times. I'm against those kinds of rituals. But I think about like, you know, like Ramadan now, right? The ritual of you praying. You fasting; if I had more if I made more rituals in my life, especially around prayer, it would be easier. You know, getting into a habit of doing something makes it easier. And I think it's so easy to. Be fully a busy life, right? Like work. If you have kids, kids if you're in a relationship. That takes her. If you're not in a relationship, you want a relationship. You got to go try to find that person, right? So, like life is happening. So, you got to make time for, for. Well, I'll say like the most divine. And I think I go to the last verse of what he said request says, oh, actually, I will go to last verse. I want to say something about verse three. I think one of the I don't know if you have tattoos, Matt, but Aaron and I definitely do. Okay. Um, and I think one of the lines that I love most of this is when he talks about tattoos for forgiveness. I ain't going to pull no tattoos out, but I definitely have uplifting tattoos, most are uplifting, like based in prayer. Like I have one on my chest. Haiti with the Maroons of Haiti and like brain all joining there in detail with imagination and all that because. Going back to people that were enslaved with masters all over that still had the imagination, the forethought that I am a full human being and I'm going to fight for it. Like I'm going to like whatever I have to do and fight to the point where, you know.

Joël: [00:28:32] You win "Freedom." You get your own freedom from the most powerful, one of the most powerful countries in the world at that time. Like that is. That is something that I. That I'm grounded in. I have another tattoo of Sofia the Holy Spirit. Like thinking about wisdom and how that's birthed and how. The only way that you stay connected for me to God, to a divine being of myself and the most divine, is by seeking that wisdom, by seeking that connection, by going out and hugging a tree. Sometimes that sounds crazy, but like you have a hug, a tree. If you hug a tree, like you could feel the vibration from the earth going through, you know? So, like. I bet those. Those are some of my tattoos. I don't know if you want to talk, Aaron.

Aaron: [00:29:27] No. Yeah. That's dope. Um, for me, I have a few tattoos. Um, that mean specific things. Uh, I have a tattoo that is more of a living. It's on my flesh. It's a, it's more of a memorial of a passing loved one. Um, and it's interesting because this person was Catholic and they had rosaries and, um, so we had a rosary tattooed onto our forearm as if, you know, it's wrapped. Um, and we're not Catholic and we don't use rosaries. We use mala beads, you know, so. But just the art itself, symbolic, you know, of that person. And every time we look at it, we

always remember them. And it's interesting because prayer is much like meditating amongst people, especially in America. We have like these ideas that they're different. They may be carried out differently. And that's all, you know, perceptive. But ultimately, it's the same thing. But it's interesting for me, when stepping back from religion, found myself talking and listening to God way more than when I was, you know, um, you know, caught up in that ritual of you do it in a specific way, at a specific place, and you say a specific thing. Um, and usually you only do it during a specific time, which meant, like, if you're if you don't call out for God, then you're good.

Aaron: [00:31:00] But when you find yourself praying, usually it was because your life is on the line or you really needed something to come through, you know? So, for me, speaking for me while in religion, um, we were kind of persuaded and taught, conditioned to believe that, you know, you call out to God when shit hits the fan. And so, we get caught up in only doing that. And I found myself on my journey outside of religion, not just communicating and reaching out to God, um, during crisis, but giving, giving thanks and gratitude every day that we wake up. Like every morning I wake up, it just felt like, damn, this is more of a privilege and a blessing than when I was in religion. It was kind of like I was distracted by things, so I never really, like, had an opportunity to always focus or daily focus on having gratitude. It was caught up in like a calendar system that was like, well, this is the month in which you give gratitude and like, that's the only time in which you give gratitude. Whereas us stepping out of religion every day is gratitude. It's not caught up in a calendar system, but it's caught up in, oh shit, I woke up this morning.

Aaron: [00:32:15] You know, God is good, you know, because that day could come where we don't wake up and it's like, well, I hope the last few hours that I lived, I lived it to my utmost. And that is dawning on us as we journey outside of religion, because there's no doctrine to promise us that it will absolutely be this way. And so now we're stepping on faith. And faith is shaking. Faith is not absolute. And that was interesting for us too, as a poet. You know, Rick Ross using Psalm 27, you know, and "Psalms" itself is poetry, biblical poetry, you know. So, for David poetically saying, you know, the Lord is my light and my salvation. I mean, this then goes back to the promise, right? So, God promising Abraham in Genesis. Uh 12 uh, verses one through three. Now the Lord said to Abraham, go from your, your, country and your kindred and your father's house, to the land that I will show you, and I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

Aaron: [00:33:35] Blessed. Excuse me. You know Rick Ross falling back on this promise? You know what I'm saying? Like, poetically through hip hop, he is reiterating in Genesis 12 one through three, you know, because God promised I should not fear. God promised me the Promised Land. God promised me that, you know, basically these things will be taken care of if I do right by God, if I remain steadfast and I keep faith in God will providing. So, it's like this inter-loop of ancient faith and promising that Rick Ross is now starting his song with, which is very interesting, you know, because for a person to be in the hood and not go to seminary, not be caught up in Christianity on a on those rituals of every week he's in the streets, whether he's there or not. He's "symbolically representing" those who are in the streets, trap houses and what have

you. They have no other way. Maybe they felons. You got to make your bread and hustle. It's for that audience in which he's telling this story. But like, biblically, he's giving like this reminder stay steadfast. You know, God promised us and we God's people. What do you guys think about that?

Joël: [00:34:54] I was I was thinking about what you said about. See the definition in the Bible and then that as well, like corresponding to verse four. Um, in verse four, basically where Rick Ross is telling God, you've been with me through thick and thin, right? So, I'm just trying to get right and then going to you brought up faith and. I got to get this. I got to get the definition too. But basically, if you go to Hebrews, it defines what faith is. And if you go to the Message Bible, one of the sentences of "faith" is our handle on what we can't see. So, you know, I think that ties it together really well. And I think prayer is that same thing. It's our handle on what we can't see. It's our anchor. So, the deepest part of ourselves that ties us to the divine. And that's where we need to. That's why we need to be doing it. That's where we need to say that's where we need to stay, I should say. And no matter how we do it, it's good no.

Joël: [00:36:15] Matter how we do it. If you connect them to divine, I think it's right.

Kid Lacey: [00:36:23] I completely agree. Um, and I think, yeah, to like, restate it all that, uh, with prayer being, you know, the closest thing to, you know, being close thing to that faith that, um, which basically, you know, impart is what you, you know, can take, you know, what is it control of what you can't or reconciling with that which you can't see that kind of like essentially. Yeah. Um, like, yeah, I mean, that and that's, that's what prayer is. Prayer is stepping on that faith, you know, stepping on that. Um, you know, I can't see you. I, I'm not even really sure I have the most control in this situation, you know, but. As said before, you know, I'm going to remain steadfast. I'm going to continue. And then I it's funny. Right? I think that this song is a testament in multiple ways. I think it's a testament one as like I think one it's a testament, like just lyrically, um, to speak on, you know, just what, where prayer has brought him, um, as he's, you know, like as far as the song goes, he's spoken about, you know, 12 years and I really like it's on genius. It's verse two, but it's technically like the first like rap, the verse that he raps, um, but like, I like it because he's kind of like to me, he's kind of generally answering the question as to like what a prayer is, you know? And then when you get that, obviously you get what's a prayer for me? You know, really, because he's not going to, you know, tell us what it is for everybody else.

Kid Lacey: [00:38:02] Um, and through that, as well as. I guess, as well as the last verse that we were just speaking on. Um, it's shown, you know, the progression and whatnot. But also, I think that this song is a testament. And so that shows the prayer that shows staying steadfast. That's like it. It's evidence, you know, that it not that it works, and you can do it too. It's like if you do it this exact way, but that it works for somebody if you, um. If you have the same sentiment, you know, if you're doing this, you know, to connect, to remain, you know, to, you know, just be a better vessel. Um, but I also think that, um, this song is a testament because of the time, um, that it was released. It's so funny, when I was going through the lyrics or going through like, genius to find the album, because I also listened to The Cross That line and like the stuff on that.

Kid Lacey: [00:39:05] But, um, when I was scrolling to get to Port of Miami because he already because he already got a sequel to this album that dropped, like, only like a few years ago, you know? But it's funny that it's not like, oh, Port of Miami two. And then here's number one. It's like, no Port of Miami two. This album, that album, this album, that album, like, like ten other things before I get to it. Um, and this released into, I think I'm not mistaken, it said 2006, you know, and so seven it's crazy. That's 17 years ago. You know, it's more crazy for me just because I can't fathom. I can't fathom that amount of years. You know, I'm only 22, but, um, yeah, like it was seven years ago. And I think now, if anything, like even more so than, than what the song has spoken of lyrically, Ross has elevated to an even bigger or what 1st May perceive as a better place, you know? And what would hope as a better place. Like he seems more prosperous now you like the biggest thing of Rick Ross is his, you know, the amount of land that he has now. And like all the his animals and his what like. And I just like that because I like seeing that side of Ross and him talking about all that, teaching people how to be billionaires and stuff like that.

Kid Lacey: [00:40:24] Um, because as far as what I can't know and I can't, um, you know, 100%, you know, be sure. But as far as I perceive it, it looks like. He's really in touch with that. This love presence, this joy presence, this our God. You know, other people's just, you know. Life force, you know, whatever you want to call it. He's in touch with that, with that divine. With that divine. Um, it as it looks like I can't even, you know, I can't speak as a fact, but it looks like it. Um, and, yeah, I just I just like speaking on where faith can take you so long as you remain steadfast or where prayer can take you more. So, um, so long as you remain consistent, um, you know, and just with the right head on your shoulders, or maybe not even head, because thinking's too much, like with the right heart, you know, at the right place in your heart, you know that you can get somewhere in two different ways because he already showed us in a song. But, you know, we're 17 years removed. We already know. You know how Ross life has only gotten better; you know?

Joël: [00:41:35] Yeah, yeah.

Joël: [00:41:37] And I think that's a great way to kind of bring it to a conclusion though, like. This shows us his example. You know, he has the Port of Miami two, and he has a second prayer song, which is, you know, similar. Yeah. He does I didn't yeah, I didn't bring it in. But he does. But it is you could see. You could basically that see that growth, right. That anchor that he has in his prayer and his faith. Has made him grow into. I don't see a deeper person, but made him grow somewhere that he really desired to go, you know? And prayer doesn't necessarily always do that for us if it's financial, but. From my experience, from my experience today and years ago. And prayer has definitely. Brought me out of the darkest spaces of my life. Those are some of the. That's the only way I was able to get out. And then listening to that small, still voice that sometimes, you know, if because it's a conversation, listening to that, that voice, you know, of the divine. Has brought me to the best places in my life as well. So, I think it's important for our audience to know whatever you're doing to speak to the divine, however you do it and to do it, and then hold on to it, because, you know, that's the tie between you and the divine and just keep practicing it. And any last words?

Aaron: [00:43:35] Uh. Not really. I mean, we agree with what you said. Absolutely. Well said. Um, and I guess the only thing we would highlight is you mentioned that, uh, he created a new

prayer song, and you're right. And it's interesting how you can see where someone's at in their life. Mhm. Um, based on their prayers, what they're asking for. And I think that deserves a whole episode in itself. Um, I.

Joël: [00:44:02] I think Aaron is inviting you to a part two here.

Joël: [00:44:05] Yeah. I think this invite to a part two.

Kid Lacey: [00:44:07] Yeah, that.

Aaron: [00:44:08] Would be dope.

Kid Lacey: [00:44:08] Yeah. I love the conversations that y'all have. So, I would, I would definitely love to be back, you know.

Aaron: [00:44:15] All right. Dope, dope, dope.

Joël: [00:44:17] Thank you. Thank you so much.

Joël: [00:44:19] Thank you for being with us. Thank you for having me. You can check him out, kid. Lacy. Com.

Kid Lacey: [00:44:24] Indeed.

Joël: [00:44:25] Now, now, since you are such like I've seen your growth in your in your lyrics, in your; I would say as a lyricist and an emcee. I've seen that growth.

Kid Lacey: [00:44:37] Yeah, I appreciate it. I'm going to ask one.

Joël: [00:44:40] I might get myself in trouble asking this question, like what is your if you had to name one song as your number one song of all time, what would it be?

Kid Lacey: [00:44:52] Oh, okay.

Joël: [00:44:53] Hip hop.

Kid Lacey: [00:44:55] Whoa. Just like as a listener.

Joël: [00:44:58] Yeah, yeah.

Joël: [00:44:59] Anything you love.

Kid Lacey: [00:45:00] Damn. So, number like one. I couldn't even I couldn't even think about. I couldn't even, like, come up with, like, a one song. This is the like, this is the best one. But, um.

Kid Lacey: [00:45:18] Damn.

Kid Lacey: [00:45:19] See? Okay, I get maybe I work, or maybe if I could kind of are. You're just asking just so I can say it. Or is there.

Joël: [00:45:27] Something you like? It isn't like, let's say there are a lot of. Artists I like.

Kid Lacey: [00:45:33] Right.

Joël: [00:45:35] I think what anchored me in hip hop. Was Eric B and Rakim and carries one.

Kid Lacey: [00:45:43] Amen.

Joël: [00:45:44] Like that is. That is how I fell in love. Like I would listen to both albums. My dad got me the paid and full album by mistake. You didn't know what was on it. And I listened to that album every day. Yeah. Like, I was supposed to be asleep, and I'd be, like, listening to it.

Kid Lacey: [00:46:06] Yeah.

Joël: [00:46:07] Anything like that for you?

Kid Lacey: [00:46:09] Yeah. Then. Then. Yeah, most definitely. Like, I wouldn't, I wouldn't be able to name the song, but easily, like, in a sense of what grounded me. Um, just growing up, like, okay, maybe there's three different people. Just be. It is funny. Uh, I guess, like this trifecta. Um, but, like, like, really just in terms of being a, um. An MC for myself, being in love with hip hop and being like, okay, you know what? You can do this or not, you can do this. I want to do this. Mhm. Um, it was listening to Kanye, um, because at the time it was different. Kanye, you know, um, and like I remember like hearing Gold Digger not knowing what none of that means, not knowing how raunchy but clever, you know, and how, you know, complex, you know, a song like a composition like that is I was just like, I like this, I think I can do it. And so, listening to Kanye in that sense kind of just like got me more attuned to how rap goes, how rap flows without being guns, drugs, this, this and that. You know what I mean up front. Um, because even he still talks about certain things. Um, but then through that, the first album that I purchased was the Carter three. Um, so I'm Lil Wayne is my number one. Like, he won't get knocked off like, ever, like I can't, I like I would say until he dies, but like, when he dies, he's gonna be the, he ain't gonna be the greatest rapper alive or the greatest rapper of all time.

Joël: [00:47:41] But I like that.

Kid Lacey: [00:47:42] And I but I switched I am I have a lot of conversations like this. So, I am keen about criteria. And so, I know me saying greatest is opinionated. The one thing that's a fact is he's, my favorite. Yeah. So, um, you know, him and I fell in love with him, you know, just because of, like, he really showed me what an MC could do, you know, just punch lines, uh, you know, bars, the wittiness, the things that you don't get until you listen, you know, 17 years later like that, like I, I fell for that. And I was like, not only can I do this, but like, I just want to listen. I just want to keep listening to this guy, you know? Um, and that was a big hip hop starter for me just because I was like, I purchased that on iTunes. I was like the first, like the first thing, um,

and that more recently and it hasn't changed since has been, um, Kendrick Lamar, that is, that is my guy, like, top to bottom, like, I think every, every offering he's put out, I'd go to the, uh, we could, we could, we could sit in court and argue, you know, why this is better than that or why that's better than this.

Kid Lacey: [00:48:50] You know, like, I love him. I love the way that he, like, packs up the lyrics. I love what he just does with a song. You know, it's funny because the way that I even looked into this raw song, I've never tried. I'd never looked, treated a raw song like this. I listen to Rick Ross, I'm like, It's Rick Ross, I'm gonna listen for this vibe, this blah blah blah. But it's funny, me and my friends talk about it and one of my homeboys says, you know, Rick Ross made Grown man music, like, you know what I mean? And like, we didn't know what? Like we didn't know what that meant specifically, but we're like, no, that's that, that's true. Like, it just makes sense. You know, it sounds like that. Right? And so, I'm not listening to Ross in the same way that I, that I, you know, have listened to Kendrick for the past, you know, ten or whatever years and then specifically going to music school, I've just learned so much more about the composition, what you want to do with it, how, you know, is your thesis there. Like, I look at songs now, like a, like an essay, you know, I'm like, did you get your point across? Did you write songs?

Joël: [00:49:55] The way I look at preaching.

Kid Lacey: [00:49:57] Yeah, yeah. You know, and, and…

Kid Lacey: [00:49:59] It makes sense, right? When it's your passion, you know. Yeah. You, you can enjoy, you can enjoy other people's expressions. But you're going to be like, okay, how could I do that better? Or what did they you know, how what's this, what's that? You're looking at it in a thousand different ways. And so now this was just such an interesting conversation to have, which is why I definitely, you know, whenever, um, I would love to come back and just speak more about some other stuff because, um, I never thought, like without this situation, I don't know, the next time I'm listening to prayer or even cross that line like the Rick Ross songs from 2006, like, I have to be.

Joël: [00:50:39] Cross that line is fire man. I wanted to talk about that.

Kid Lacey: [00:50:42] Yeah, and it's funny, like it made, uh, listening to that in my headphones, I was like, damn, I didn't know how much I missed, um, hearing Akane's voice.

Joël: [00:50:51] Yeah.

Kid Lacey: [00:50:53] But yeah, just like, um, with that progression of, like, you know, how I fell in love with hip hop and especially, like, with the top of the top being Kendrick. Now I, you know, I just I just look at songs like at a much deeper level and, you know, so I will do the initial critique, you know, how did you do it, could you do it better, blah, blah blah. But like the main thing is like, what are you saying? And did it reach me? You know what I mean? Did I, did I receive it? And so, bringing that into this, like, I, I definitely see that it's worth it. Like and I'm a huge, Huge like as you can probably tell. And as I've been able to tell of y'all, you know, just

huge hip hop fan like huge art enthusiast, you know, to an extent. So, like, you know, I just love talking about stuff like this. I really appreciate it.

Juicy

Joël: [00:00:00] Welcome to Hip Hop and Theology, a space of theological and decolonizing thoughts that attempts to increase humanity through the theo-poetics of hip hop and theology. I'm excited to get into today's dialogue. Let's get into it. Gentlemen. Thank you. Thank you for coming. Welcome to hip hop and theology. I love it. A space where we, I like to say we journey together in theological and decolonizing thought through the art of hip hop. We got returning guests. JP Reynolds, who holds a MDiv from Yale University, has been named remarkably special. You have a very long, um, bio, so I'll make it short. Remarkably special as an artist and creative consultant. Um, as an abolitionist, JP has a background in ministry, education and, you know, as a rapper, poet, songwriter, and performer. We also have kid Lacy. Hey, Matt. Um, MC songwriter, producer. Who's had a love for music since he was able to sing in his church choir, and he specifically started getting into hip hop. I love this after hearing Gold Digger. I love that. Love that. Um, I want to start with a quote. And then we'll get into the song. It's a quote from MLK and it says oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The yearning for freedom eventually manifests itself. And I think it's a quote that really speaks to. Biggie's juicy and. That's what all bodies who are oppressed really, really move from towards a space of finding and being in their wholeness as a self.

Joël: [00:02:18] Um, so I want to start there. Now I'm going to talk about like for myself. Juicy is one of my favorite songs of all time. All genres, all languages that I understand. It's just it's at the top of the list for me. It's definitely at the top. Um, and for me, you know, and we'll get into the lyrics. It's really biblical, right? For me it's biblical because and I'm talking from a Christians perspective. It's a song of it's a rags to riches story. It's a song almost of redemption, you know?

And it's gripping. It's powerful, you, see? You see the ride, um, in the lyrics that that biggie presents. Because just his narrative, his flow. I could see it. I like, literally see the, the movements in front of my eyes and in my brain as I hear it. So, for me, this is number one. Well, I don't want to say number one. This is definitely at the top of the list of, of all the songs that I love. And I, I'd be remiss if I didn't consider it, um, for its theological aspects. I think we could jump right in. Do we do we need to hear the song before we go on?

Biggie: [00:03:57] Yeah. This album is dedicated to all the teachers that told me I'll never amount to nothing. To all the people that lived above the buildings that I was hustling from that call the police on me when I was just trying to make some money to feed my daughter. Yeah, yeah. To all my peoples in the struggle, you know what I'm saying? It's all good, baby, baby, shake it, shake. It was all a dream. I used to read Word Up magazine, salt n Pepa and Heavy D up in the limousine, hanging pictures on my wall every Saturday.

Biggie: [00:04:23] Rap attack, Mr. Magic, Marley Marl I let my tape rock till my tape pop. Smoking weed and bamboo sipping on private stock.

Biggie: [00:04:30] Way back when I had the red and black lumberjack with the hat. To match. Remember rappin Duke? The hard, the hard. You never thought that hip hop.

Biggie: [00:04:39] Would take it this far. Now I'm in the limelight. Cause I rhyme tight. Time to get paid. Blow up like the world trade. Born sinner.

Biggie: [00:04:46] The opposite of a winner. Remember when I used to eat sardines for dinner? Peace to Ron G Brucey B kick to pre Funkmaster Flex. Lovebug starski. I'm blowing up like you thought I would. Call the crib. Same number, same hood. It's all good, all good huh? And if you don't know.

Biggie: [00:05:03] Now you know you know you know. I will bear for you money. Them. Soulja. Boy. So you. Say. One and only one. I'll give you money. I made the change from a common thief to.

Biggie: [00:05:26] Up close and personal with Robin Leach. And I'm far from cheap. I smoke skunk with my peeps all day. Spread love. It's the Brooklyn way. The Moet and Alizé keep me pissy. Girls used to diss me. Now they write letters cause they miss me I never thought it could happen. This rapping stuff I was too used to packing accent stuff. Now honeys play me close like butter play toast from the Mississippi down to the East coast. Condos and queens in.

[00:05:46]

Biggie: [00:05:51] Dough for weeks. Sold out seats.

Biggie: [00:05:52] To hear Biggie Smalls speak. Living life without fear. Putting five karats in my baby girl ear. Lunches, brunches, interviews by the pool. Considered a fool cause.

Biggie: [00:06:03] I dropped out of high school. Stereotypes of a black male misunderstood. And it's still all good. Oh so good. And if you don't know.

Biggie: [00:06:12] Now you know, know, know. You know I love you for who you are, big boy. Don't talk to me for this long. Mansion. Mansion. They don't live on.

Biggie: [00:06:33] Super Nintendo, Sega Genesis. When I was dead broke, man, I couldn't picture this 50 inch screen money green leather sofa. Got to ride the limousine with the chauffeur.

Biggie: [00:06:44] Phone bill about two G's flat. No need to worry. My accountant handles that and my whole crew is lounging, celebrating every day. No more public housing.

Biggie: [00:06:53] Thinking back on my one room shack now, my mom pimps her act.

Biggie: [00:06:57] With minks on her back and she loves to show me off. Of course. Smiles every time my face is up in the sauce. We used to fuss when the.

Biggie: [00:07:04] Landlord dissed us. No heat. Wonder why Christmas missed us. Birthdays was the worst days. Now we sip champagne.

Biggie: [00:07:11] When we thirsty. Oh damn right I like the life I live. Cause I went from negative to positive. And it's all all good, all good.

Biggie: [00:07:20] And if you don't know now you know you know.

Biggie: [00:07:23] You know you know about money. Oh oh so close.

Biggie: [00:07:30] And if you don't know.

Biggie: [00:07:31] Now you know you know, you know so, so. Oh, God. Consoling only.

Speaker3: [00:07:39]

Joël: [00:08:41] I want to start off at the beginning of the song. I think like right before he starts rapping with the intro, it's something that really that really hits me. He's like, the album is dedicated basically to all the teachers and all the people who told me I'd never amount to nothing. And as a black man in America, as much as I've had people uphold me, I've had plenty of people. He told me I'd never amount to nothing, right? Like whether it's in school, if I had any issues learning or whatever. Like I, you know, been called stupid, been called dumb, been called lazy because I didn't understand, like all these things that especially if you grew up in the 80s and 90s, I don't know, like it's a different generation now. They still get the same thing in different ways, but, uh, it's definitely something that I went through. And I love the fact that that's how he starts. He starts. So.

Kid Lacey: [00:09:44] Uh, so I guess I have a question then for you would be where you are now in your rags to riches, you know, kind of parallel if you saw, you know, said person who, you know, these people who called you these things and did all these things, uh, how would how do you think that you would, uh, approach it and this is kind of like a two parter or not a two parter, but it's like a I have a feeling of like what you may answer it with, because then I have something to say about how biggie goes about it, too, I think, like, would you approach it with grace? You know.

Joël: [00:10:20] I mean, I hope so. That's the real answer. Okay.

Kid Lacey: [00:10:26] That's perfect. You know. And that's perfect because I think that it's wild that you speak about. It's not wild. I mean, I love that you speak about how the song is, you know, in a sense biblical. And I feel like thinking about just the aspect of, I mean, now he's biggie, and, you know, biggie can get raunchy and say some of the craziest things, because even technically he does start it off with like, fuck all you hos. Get a grip. Yeah, that is correct.

Joël: [00:10:54] That's exactly how he.

Kid Lacey: [00:10:55] You know, but you know, but it's cool how they I think how it's kind of mixed. It's kind of like push. It sounds like. It sounds like he was saying it in a different kind of like context. So, it's so it's not kind of like he's coming into this track with animosity. So, I think it's funny that he pointed. Not funny. I think it's just the ass to the aspect of Grace. He, um, you know, he's dedicating the album to the haters, you know, as well as the lovers and the supporters and whatnot. Whereas the people that I listen to now, when they'll speak about the people that said they weren't, you know, they wouldn't be nothing. The only thing they say now is, oh, I'm rich now, or I got money or like blah blah, blah, like and some it's some type of like disrespectful manner. Um, and just like speaking about that, you know, just since we're like, ruminating on the intro, um, like, I think it's just really interesting that it's dedicated. It's not like, you know, this album is in spite of y'all, you know, or this album's blah, blah, blah. It's like, you know, this all kind of made me, um, yeah.

Gogoh: [00:12:03] I want to offer a little pushback. Um, I was gonna say.

Gogoh: [00:12:06] He starts off by saying, you know, come on, fuck all you hos. Get a grip, motherfucker. Like, that's there's nothing graceful about that.

JP: [00:12:16] I was gonna say he's gotta give it up the smoke.

JP: [00:12:19] He's saying that facetiously. He's like, this album is dedicated to all y'all.

Kid Lacey: [00:12:23] Aight.

Gogoh: [00:12:25] The dedication part is to.

Gogoh: [00:12:28] Okay, when he says, fuck all you.

Gogoh: [00:12:30] Hoes, get a grip, motherfucker. He's putting it out there, right? Right. But then I think the dedication is, is where the specificity comes in, right? Because you can take it as him just being euphemistic when he first comes in. However, when he says the dedication, now you know who he's directing that animosity towards. So, I think there is some kind of rancor in his, in his tone and in his voice, you know, because initially, if as a hip hop artist, if you just say something like that, you don't know who you're directing it towards, it could just be just for musical perspective. Right? However, once he says the dedication part, now you know where he's going with the tone and who he's directing toward. So, I don't know if there's grace there. There's, uh. Because I live the same experience. Joe. Live. I've been called everything. I came here not speaking English. Uh, and a lot of the ones who I see now who used to make fun of me back then, some of them asked me for a dollar when they see me. And I'm just like, who? Like I don't even respond. I just give him the. Get a grip, motherfucker. Look, you know what I mean? Like.

Joël: [00:13:36] Um.

JP: [00:13:37] But the thing still that that African kid that you used to make fun of. Mm. You know, the thing I was, the thing I would add is like, I think in that dedication part, he's absolutely being petty. I think he's absolutely being wild. Petty. But I will say, Matt, the grace thing is interesting because I don't maybe I have to look at it again, but I don't think he mentions haters for the rest of the song. Right? Like it's kind of like I only get half a bar, right? Like you get this half a bar. This intro, he mentions the landlord, he speaks, you gotta, you gotta, you gotta really, really go into it. Okay? Like there's a part where it says, um, where the landlord dissed us. Yeah. No, he Christmas he does. So, although he's not calling them by name, he's, he's, he's putting up the instances where it used to be this way. Now it's this way. Yeah. But I guess I guess what I'm. I guess I'm saying though, is that the center of that or the orientation of that of, of those mentionings are still, are him. Right. It's like his story. It's not like he's not dissing. He's not he's not necessarily dissing the landlord. He's just saying what happened.

Kid Lacey: [00:14:42] It's an acknowledgment.

JP: [00:14:43] There's a to me there's a difference in like telling the story as it is and then like, uh, you know, straightforward going at somebody and just kind of dissing them like, like it's like that's why that's why I see the shift of what you're talking about is interesting. Right? Like throughout the whole record, all three verses, which is classic. I think this may be the first song I learned the lyrics to. Like, for real, like every single lyric. Same. Um, but I but it's interesting because I'm like, I don't like the whole joint. I think he brings people up or he mentions things, but it's all from his perspective. He's centered. It's not. It doesn't feel as petty. It's like it doesn't feel as petty as the intro. The intro is like it's dedicated to all y'all. You know, I'm saying he's orienting the dedication around all of y'all, but then the rest of the song, it's about me and my perspective of what I went through, which is interesting. I don't know if that's Grace. I don't know if that's Grace.

Kid Lacey: [00:15:33] Maybe I would, maybe not Grace, maybe more so great. I don't even know if it's gratefulness, but just acknowledgment of how what, uh, which ways they played into his story and then now telling his story, you know, without even saying names. You know.

JP: [00:15:51] This is what I would say with Joel. You talk about how it's biblical, right? Like one of the things, I learned very importantly about biblical Scripture is that, uh, in a lot of ways it is descriptive, not prescriptive. Right. So, what we get from Biggie's song is description. We get the descriptive text; we get him describing what is happening. It's not necessarily that's I'm like it's interesting to try to delineate between when he's like. Talking about somebody else or calling somebody else out, or he's just describing what happened. Right. Like I have I don't know if I've done the close enough read in with this particular lens to give it that attention. But that's interesting to me when you call it biblical, because, like, I've never listened to the song theologically, if I'm honest, I don't know that I would give it. Even now I'm like, I don't know how we give it the pass of being theological. I think we can put a theological framework on it. Mhm. Um, and it's like there's plenty of moments that are more. Maybe more. Uh. Theological on the surface level, right? Like born sinner, the opposite of a winner. Remember when I used to like, I mean, this this stuff that's like more apparent, but there's also some subtextual things I would love to hear from you all that like. All right, make it theological.

Joël: [00:17:10] We going to get into this. We going to get into this. First of all, it is descriptive, right? For me it's like an autobiography. He starts with his childhood in Bed-Stuy and not like, not what we know now, but like the Bed-Stuy that, you know. Like Bethany Baptist Church that they used to run Operation Breadbasket because there was no food going around. Right. The Bed-Stuy where I hear about in the 70s, like if people car started breaking down in Bed-Stuy, you just keep driving. Like, that's that's the Bed-Stuy he's talking about, right? Not like. I lived in Bed-Stuy. What? Um. Maybe 1013 years ago and had a studio apartment where they needed a Murphy bed, and my apartment was $2,000. That's not the bed side we talk about. He talked about his childhood. He talked about his time hustling. He talks about, you know, his dreams of being a rapper. And he actually started rapping while he was in jail, right? Like not rapping, but he started writing his stuff down. Right. He talks about his influences because he mentioned them and thanking them in there. So, like this is very descriptive about him so I agree. Top we got some petty fuck y'all. And then I'm going to tell you, my story. Um. And I just I love it. We start with I got I gotta show you my t shirt. I gotta go down. I'm gonna do the whole rest of the one just like this. We start with. It was all a dream, right? It was all a dream I used to read weren't a magazine.

Gogoh: [00:18:55] Can I throw a wrench in here?

Joël: [00:18:57] Uh oh. Go ahead, go ahead, I love wrenches.

Gogoh: [00:19:00] Look. Look at Biggie as Moses. And draw a parallel from that. Because he was once living in exile. But no longer. He once didn't have anything. All he could do was dream about being free. All he could do was dream about having whatever it is he wanted, or he or he could do was dream about having his people come with him and do and living the life that they were supposed to live, or at least in their head. At least they were born thinking that they're supposed to be free and doing what they wanted. So, you have those who already have, you know, whether it be Empire or the music industry or anyone else who wanted to keep that oppressive thumb on them. This is his get all you, you know, get a get a grip. Kind of connotation in my opinion. So, you can look at it theologically. You just have to find the right

parallel to say, okay, well, what oppression did he come up from underneath, and how was he successful? How did he get there and what manifested afterwards? He talked about his mom. Living the life afterwards. So, this is going from having nothing to the land of milk and honey, so to speak. You know, it doesn't directly, you know, 100% translate, but I can draw an effective parallel with those two scenarios.

Joël: [00:20:15] You are talking about Moses I when going through this, Abraham jumped to mind because I started really thinking about like. Christian, Jewish, Muslim traditions, and Abraham, the father of those traditions. And you, you start from. Not well, we're going to get non-believing. Like Abraham's chosen. Like I don't even know you, God. And you chose me. I'm going to follow along this path. So, this is I'm putting faith. I'm doing the action. And then. Okay, that's kind of fucked up. I started to say it like that. Abraham pimping out his wife. More than once. Like Abraham got some issues, like all of us. But then he follows the path and is faithful to. His call or his art, his craft, whatever you want to say. Because I'm thinking like about biggie in this sense and then see the results. So, I would even like you can there's so many. People in the biblical narrative that you could pull up. I think a lot of the prophets you can go to and draw parallels. I see a lot of thinking going on.

JP: [00:21:37] I think. I think one thing that is hard for me to get over and not even hard for me to get over just wrestling, because this is like I said, this is a different way for me to think about this song. The song is so material and I think, I think that is and it's also so internal for me. This is hard to call it prophetic because it doesn't it doesn't necessarily speak to anyone else's reality. At least I don't. I never heard it that way. Right. Like unless it's just he's describing his thing as celebratory or I can do this too, right? I don't know, to me, I don't know to me that that is prophetic. The Moses angle is interesting. I still I'm still wrapping my head around it because to me this is a matter of like rags to riches. Yes, I think redemption is the thing for me. That ties it to a theological framework, right? Like it was once this way, now it is this way. And we are celebrating, right? Like this is again, I don't know if I could call it Grace. It's definitely celebratory. It's definitely joy. Um, and it's definitely like how I got over right. Like it's one of those I'm still wrapping my head around the prophetic nature of it. I just, I don't know that I would to me, it doesn't give me that spirit if I'm honest, if I'm just being completely honest. Right. Like, it doesn't it doesn't give me a prophetic spirit unless you're just telling about the fact that he is forth telling what happened to him. But again, to me, that's I like the angle of calling it biblical because it is descriptive of a thing. It is descriptive of a person's life and journey. And to me that is sacred. But yeah, I'm wrapping my head around some of the other, other offerings here. Yeah.

Kid Lacey: [00:23:12] Same here. Honestly. I mean, I guess in that sense, like the way that I see it is you could see it like biblical, like as, as Jay said, through a lot of different like through the lenses. Um, it definitely like for me was not my upbringing. You know, there is no parallel for me and big. You feel me now? I'm in Brooklyn, so like. You know, maybe like retrospectively but like, no like so it but I understand that at least for what this outside of the materials and the content of this song and outside of even like the specific then subject matter. Um, like what the song did for then people could be seen as like a biblical kind of offering in a sense, if you want to use the word, uh, prophetic or whatnot. Um, I feel like outside of, like the materials and whatnot, like, the song is a classic, and I feel like we throw this word around in a classic. I feel like it

could be simply defined as a classic, as a song that you listen to a lot of times, and everybody feels it, but there's something deeper than that, you know? And so I could definitely see how there's a lot of larger, um, ways into how this can be seen as biblical. Um, but yeah, I mean, the way that I've come, at least in the past, then 20 minutes to see this as a biblical offering, that I guess then to use that word as I see this as a testimony, I mean, um, you know, from like, just from my perspective, like it, you know, because this is something that allows me to then gain some more understanding of somebody else's, um, situation, you know, and if I get something from that, you know, if I get my mustard seed from that and whatnot, you know, so be it. But, you know, I do see it as, you know, this this is this is his story. You know.

Gogoh: [00:25:08] JP, let me offer you something in terms of, um, seeing the prophetic in it. Right. If you look at the chorus, just read the chorus now. Yeah. I was just about to talk about the chorus. You know very well who you are. Don't let him hold you down. Reach for the stars. That's that to me. Um. It's. It speaks of not just knowing or the fact that you should know who you are and what you're destined to be or. Or the reason that you're here. Um, but it speaks to where I come from. It speaks to my ancestors speaking into me. It speaks to my aunt who used to watch me, talking to me, telling me all the time. And, you know, you have it here when they say, oh, you are somebody. But. Um, we have this thing where we say, um, in my own jumble. In my own jumble. That means. Do you know who you are? Do you know who you are? And it's not a question. It's just a chant. And it's something that you say when you're going through hard times. When, when I'm having difficulty in class. I say that to myself. Like, I literally talk to myself in pidgin, you know, like it's a subdialect of of Igbo. Right. And I talk to myself in my native tongue because that that speaks to my core.

Gogoh: [00:26:23] So if I didn't know who I was before this exam, I know who I am taking this exam because I didn't get here by myself. So, when I read that, that's one thing that comes to me in terms of the prophetic. But the other thing also is, um. Biggie says over and over. And if you don't know, now you know. You know, that's also reiterating. So, if you didn't know about me from before, as a little poor kid who didn't have, now you're going to know. And it speaks to again, that prophecy that he knew to himself whenever it happened, however it happened, that he wasn't destined to stay in the position you know, he was born into or that he currently was, you know, so and I say that because these things keep coming back. It's the chorus, it's the hook, it keeps coming back. It's a reminder. Prophecy always comes back. Prophecy never leaves, but prophecy always comes back. You're trying to put it out of your mind. But what happens? Something will jog your memory and take you right back to that. If you want to run from what you were destined to do, what will happen? Something will cause you to go right back to that spot again, and it'll keep reminding you.

Gogoh: [00:27:34] So you're going to constantly ask yourself, do you know who you are? Do you know who you are? So, I see it because it resonates with me. Aside from what Joel said earlier. But. And I didn't live a true right. Well, I did live a. Because I literally came here with one set of clothes. I came to this country with the clothes on my back. Yeah. You know, so I wore the same clothes to school every day and was picked on, was made fun of. And I'm the person I am today because of having gone through that. So, the material part I understand because right now in my closet, I got it all. But it's not because I'm a fashion plate. It's because you know what? That satisfies something in me I didn't have before. But I no longer shop like

that because it's not. I realize it's not about the material things anymore. It's about me knowing who I am first and then putting the clothes on after, as opposed to me putting on the clothes first and trying to figure out who I am after. I like the connection with the end of his verses. If you don't know, now you know which is a chant in and of itself, because it's one of those like knowing phrases.

Gogoh: [00:28:45] It's like we just all right, we just get it. You don't know. Now we get it right. And it definitely connects to the chorus, which is an interesting flip from the original song, which I wanted to bring up. Right. Because that's another when you talk about ancestry, and we talked about executing music earlier. Right. Like they're flipping a song from an earlier era. And to me, that's to me that's really important. Um, when we talk about the prophetic nature of this and, and the breadcrumbs and, um, you know, when we talk about prophecy in the biblical text, it's often, especially when we get to like Jesus, he's often repeating things that were said before. Right? And that's how we like, oh, fulfillment of prophecy. So, we're actually seeing that kind of take place musically. That's and that's hip hop generally with sampling with like reiterating former melodies or bass lines or vibes. Right. Which I think is a powerful part of hip hop. And yeah, that's a good that's a good connection because I, you know, admittedly, I wasn't I wasn't thinking about the hook all that much in this song because I always be so focused on the biggie verses. I just be I'm like, but now that's a good connection. Uh, if you don't know, now, you know.

Kid Lacey: [00:29:51] And I agree about the hook never made me. I, I didn't think about the hook in that sense. Like to kind of examine it. And then I never thought about the aspect that it's being that it's something that's being flipped. Then as soon as, uh, you had brought up the hook, I immediately go to Wikipedia because I'm. So, I went to school for music. And so, my I'm big on liner notes and, and personnel. So, I'm like, all right, so who, who we did this verse then the only writer that's listed is Christopher Wallace. So, my only thoughts is that it would be its him and Diddy that then you know we're like all right we're going to change uh these last two lines. We're going to keep the you know very well who you are. Um, and like that, like that concept is just like, blows my mind too, because somebody had brought up the born sinner the opposite of a winner. And something that could be a whole other episode in and of itself is a different album so much years later by, uh, J. Cole under this, under that title Born Sinner, you know, and in the same sense where he's, uh. I forget what song he sampled, but he sampled or like sampled a few of Biggie's, um, like lines in this, um, like for what he vocally did, but then also just like for what he, like, wrote, like he interpolated a lot of just like what big said. Um, and like that, that that aspect of sampling I love. So, I just had to like, speak on that, that it like, you know, he picked it up and, and decided to move it forward and, and somebody was able to pick it up and then do the same thing. I think that's nuts.

Joël: [00:31:29] I just want to add on, um, the hook itself, the chorus, it made me, I can't remember this sermon, but it's the sermon I preached on. I believe it's from the Gospel of Mary. I had two sermons one on the Gospel Mary and one of thew Gospel Thomas. I was trying to find that I couldn't. But one of the things that it talks about, and it's like the sayings of Jesus, probably Gospel of Thomas, then what Jesus is basically telling us is we need to step into our full humanity. I've heard about heaven, right? How heaven is going to be or what happens after death. It's always a place of peace and calmness and serenity and things like that. I'm talking

about from growing up. That's what I heard. My grandfather's a bishop, my grandmother like my uncle as a Pastor. All these people. And the prescription that Jesus gives us is not dissimilar to what biggie saying, at least the way I'm taking like, you know very well who you are. And then if you don't know, you know, figure it out, and then that's how you're going to get to where you want to be. So that's what popped into my head, um, while you were talking. Go, go and continue.

Aaron: [00:32:41] To add on, that was awesome, by the way, to add on to what Gogoh said real quick, um, you really struck a chord in me when talking about this concept that I guess we sum up as resilience. And, um, so this concept of resilience, you know, combined with the power of faith in one's ability, it sort of forms a psychospiritual message, right, that speaks to the importance of perseverance and the potential for redemption. Possibly to go back to what Matt was saying earlier, we agree with your perspective in terms of grace, but I guess it was more like gratitude, right? This sense of gratitude that's being articulated throughout the song so poetically, right? This attitude of gratitude that aligns with theological teachings that also emphasize the importance of being grateful, you know, um, for the blessing in life or blessings in life. Um, it serves as a reminder to appreciate the present moment, recognizing that success is not solely attributed to individual effort, but also the support and love of others. And of course, um, theologically, for us, we just wanted to add to this space the Pursuit of dreams comes up in this song, you know, and the scripture for me that pops up, um, and doesn't take away from what you guys brought up, which was awesome too. We just never thought about it like that.

Aaron: [00:34:28] But it really was Jacob's dream for us, you know? And you know, the stairway of Heaven. You know, he was laying on a stone. I got anointed as Bethlehem. Right? But it's important because going back to Gogo's example of Moses and Exodus, Jacob was an exile. He was running from his brother who was going to kill him. So, like in the in the escaping of that, in the exile of that, going on his way to see his cousins, Jacob has a theophany, right? This experience with God the divine, but through a dream. And of course, Theo, poetically, we're not meant to take this literal, but when we're talking about dreams, the theological, you know, representation there of God communicating with us in dreams, I mean, that's deeply theological. Most importantly, um, this idea that, um, Jacob was wrestling with God and also wrestling with himself in terms of identity, you know, and towards the later end of the story, um, or deeper into the dream, Jacob's like trying to identify this god, right? Are you the God of my forefathers or, you know, um, all the way going back to Abraham, like, are you the God of Abraham? Are you still with me kind of thing? And with that, you know, Jacob had to start creating. His own theological identity.

Aaron: [00:36:02] And this is very important because before he got to his cousins, this needed to take place. If not, he would just still be doing stupid shit, like listening to his mother and getting him into situations like this when we all know he listened to his mother because he had no identity. Right? And so it's important, this whole transformational journey of self-identity and self-transformation, which is the underlying foundation of this, this song or this expression, like even by saying fuck all you hoes like it's like, yo, I've been on a journey, I've been somewhere, you know what I mean? Like, and it's like, yeah, I can't tell me shit at this point because again, I know who I am. I'm not X, Y and Z. And you know, he brings that up through the song so poetically, you know, like it does come off maybe as like shade or whatever. But when you think

about it, he's bringing them up in a way that's still in a, in a form of gratitude. Because even though he's experienced all these trials and tribulations from the hood of being in Brooklyn, you know, at that time he's made it to where now he's having like expensive ass trips, food, everything is at his fingertips, right? He was on top of the world, so to speak.

Joël: [00:37:23] I think everything we said have kind of come full circle. Great. We started with the descriptiveness of Biggie's words. We went we went through a lot. But, um, I think I think maybe. What do you think? I think. This song. Is, as I said, I think his autobiography. Right, a little bit, but I think it's he is telling us of the way he moved into his whole self, like finding consciousness. Right. The way you talked about Jacob. Right? He became conscious and found something new, right? Found a new relationship, not even with his ancestors' gods, but with his own god. Right? He formed a new relationship. What do you think about that? What I just said, like this song is a way of biggie sharing his movement to full consciousness.

Kid Lacey: [00:38:23] I could, I think I could call it a crash course into that. Kind of like a lot of ab comparisons. Mhm. And like, and in terms of just looking at the structure of the song for the verses, this is how it was. This is what it's like now. This is how it was. This is what it's like now uh hook bringing it back to a, to a common theme. Now let's go back to a verse. This is how it was. This is what it is like now. This is how it was. And so I could see I could see that in a sense of, okay, if we go from the start to the end, I would say that to, to an extent, a whole like the all the other songs on, um, Ready to Die handle specific episodes in between that beginning and that end, you know, where it could really be maybe more seen that this was, oh, this was where he got the consciousness or this was where the dream happened about, um, so like, I definitely can see it. And it just like what Aaron had said made me go crazy thinking about how then he starts the verse saying it was all a dream. Like I can, like I could see it as being the headlines, um, like to this story of, you know, his rags to riches, his finding, his consciousness. Um, I think there's a lot of sub text that's, you know, just in other songs, you know. But I'd agree generally.

Gogoh: [00:39:52] My hesitation with the consciousness thing. Let me let me just start by saying this. I think it feels like a rival for sure. This song, it feels like a rival. The way that the way that I listen to music or when I, when I listen, especially being an artist, I listen, and this is really any art or anything that's created. I look at it from three different perspectives. There's the artist, there's the created art, and then there are the people who engage with the art. So, there's an artist intention. Then there's a thing that gets created, and then there's how we read it. Right. So, in this moment, I am curious as to what biggie was trying to do. I don't know that biggie was like thinking this. I don't I just don't know, right? I don't know, I don't I can't say one way or the other what Biggie's intention was. Then we have the thing that it created classic. It resonated mad people. If you put this, I feel like a lot of people at a certain age, if you put this song on, everybody can rap all the lyrics. We know all the flows; you know all the pockets. We know all the twists and turns of the phrase. We know all three verses, right? Classic. I think in this moment, I'm, just curious. I think I'm curious. I'll put it that way. This song, I don't know if it's like, I don't know if biggie would call it like his consciousness. I don't know that Biggie would say that.

Gogoh: [00:41:04] I feel like biggie may call it. Oh, this. We made it. We made it. Right. That's it. I'm describing I'm describing how we made it. Period. That's it was actually the classy. Right.

So, I feel hesitant to put something on it. That I don't necessarily feel from big, I feel arrival, I feel celebration, I feel a recognition that they're in a different place. And gratitude, like Aaron was saying, like the gratitude is deep. I think that's a really, I thought that was a really, really powerful point, because that's the when, when, when, when Matt was talking about Grace and Gogo was talking about, uh, the initial kind of pettiness, I think what I was referring to was the gratitude. Right? Because the rest of the song feels like actual gratitude, like that first intro felt like, oh, maybe he's being petty, maybe he's being shady. But then the rest of the song, it feels like he's actually gracious. He's grateful. Like he's actually grateful. That's how it feels. So, I feel all of that. I don't, I don't know, like or maybe or maybe it's a matter of like, is arrival equal to consciousness? Right. Like what? What is the thing that Biggie is conscious of in this moment, in this particular song, in this particular record? That's the question for me. I'm just like, that's a heavy word to throw on it. Because again, you know, I there's a there's a lot there, there's a lot of subtexts there. There's a lot of like Gogoh was mentioning, there's a lot of repetition of phrases, even the phrases like, it's all good, that comes up multiple times, right? Like it's all good, it's all good, baby, baby.

Gogoh: [00:42:29] And then the hook, it's all good. It just that's the thing that repeats itself, repeats itself. So, I think I'm, I think I'm, I'm slow to call it a recognition of consciousness. I don't know why, but I feel a hesitation in my spirit, but I can't, I don't, you know, that just I don't I don't roll on that part. I don't know why. You know something though, JP? Um, just by saying it's all good. You are allowed as the listener, as the, um, interpreter. Because given given the three ways that you listen to music, you are the consumer. You are allowed to interpret it however way you want. It's all good. That's exactly. And I'm pretty sure that's, that's that also has a lot to do with where biggie was psychologically at the time, where he doesn't particularly care what's going on. It's all good, however, where you feel. And why is it all good? Because I like to kid. Lacey's point. I was once here. Now I'm here. It's all good, right? Right. You were once where you were. You're here now. It's all good. So you have the agency to say you know something? Maybe biggie did have some theological, you know, points in there. Maybe he didn't. Maybe he was being petty. Maybe it was Grace. Maybe he was being an asshole. Maybe he wasn't.

Gogoh: [00:43:49] Right. No matter what your interpretation is, it's all good. That's the that's the brilliance of the way he put it together too, though, right? Like he left that openness. He left. He left you. He left us all hanging also because, like, let's put it this way too, right? Like, even in a hook. This is interesting juxtaposition. And I and I'll admit this, right. Like, I kind of got caught up in the ad libs of the hook, right? Like I didn't even really catch the flip of because in the original song with Mtume juicy, the original juicy, they say, uh, you know what? You are right? And they say, you know who you are. That's a very important difference. It's a very important difference. But then after he says, you know who you are. Puffy's in the background going money, clothes and hos, right? Like it's like there's that's the position of the of the deep conscious with the ratchet tree. It's like so palpable that sometimes it's like it's easy to miss. It's easy to miss it. So, like, I always like money clothes and hoes like, like, like. But isn't it always one? Isn't it always that one? You trying to do the right thing? You over here, you know, with your holy self and your mans in them is over there, like, let's go get this money. You know, we got money, hos, and clothes over here. That's what I'm saying. That's the thing that's so crazy about the record, that's like, that's, uh, it's life.

Kid Lacey: [00:45:01] And that's so crazy to think about. Like that juxtaposition and how, like the complications within like the whether it was like, was this, this, this parallel or this dichotomy internationalized or was this, uh, the was it the, um, was it the reality of the studio? So was like, was biggie just like was like or was like the like was puff wanting to go in there because he's because he's puff and it's 94 and or it's 95 and they're lit. And he just wants to say money, hos and clothes because he want to get his adlibs in. Or is he like, now we gonna flip the tumor? You know, we gonna flip this part and then I'm a, I'm a head up in here and like, you know, in that's you. But that's the question. You know it begs more questions.

Gogoh: [00:45:50] And here's and here's maybe and uh, and well, maybe this is, I think what Matt Wilson just said, uh, is maybe helping me figure out my hesitation towards the conscience piece. Right. A lot of times when I think about music, especially rap music, especially biggie, the way he literally rapped, the way he walked into the studio process, it was all flow. It was flow, which often relies on unconscious or subconscious. Right. So that's why I think the consciousness. And it's not to say that he's not conscious or he's not. He's not aware of his surroundings or his story. It's not to say that he's not arriving at consciousness. I think for me, there's a power in leaning on the unconscious and the subconscious, especially for biggie, like the way that I think about his brilliance as a, as a writer and as a, as a rapper. Like, the man didn't write nothing down like that is crazy. I'm a writer. I have to write it down and put it together, look at it when I'm rapping it, and I found my voice how to deliver it. This man didn't do that.

Gogoh: [00:46:55] He just flowed. He just. It came to him, and it flowed. So, there's a there's a there's a way that he tapped into subconscious. And I think the brilliance of it, the brilliance of his mastery of that, that subconscious, that subconscious, maybe unconscious mastery is that it resonates so much that we think it's consciousness. I feel like I think I think that is, uh, I think that is the maybe the turn or the or the trajectory from the artist to the creative art to the consumer. Right. Which is like, man, was that brilliant, that he was just flowing. And we started thinking he was like deeply. And I'm not saying that's what you said. I'm just like, uh, to me, that's what I think. That's my hesitation towards identifying the consciousness of it. And it's not that again, it's not to say that he's not arriving at what is what is conscious for him. I just I think I think I lean towards flow. Okay, man, it's not and it's not also that's also not to put flow and consciousness at odds. It's not to do that. But that's my hesitation.

Kid Lacey: [00:48:02] And I feel like what it is you're it's your hesitation to your hesitation to say something about the intention allows you to really just like. I don't know, rely on the consumer aspect, and look at the creative art and the art, the creative art, which is the flow, which is the, you know, the subconscious that content. Like I I'd agree as well because I'm I mean, obviously as a writer and I think, like, I like that that word specifically consciousness is a tough one to them. Like throw around. And I think a lot about intentions now when I listen to music, I'm just like, you know, what were they thinking when they wrote this? You know, how did they, you know, do like blah blah blah. Um, and what did they want? How did they want me to feel, you know, versus how I'm feeling right now. And like, that type of stuff can definitely, like, will definitely like make me trip over myself. So, I think it's just like a tough it's tough. When we. I wouldn't say we failed to, but when we jumped, we're jumping from a lot of different, um, lenses of this song, I guess, or different experiences with this song. You know, we

have the, like theologicians listening, you know, to this song. We have artists, you know, uh, interpreting this song, you know, and like people with a bunch of different, uh, backgrounds. Yes, but different ways of already just thinking about music, you know, brilliant conversation.

Aaron: [00:49:30] I guess from a shamanic spiritual standpoint; biggie would be more conscious because he he then possesses the ability to tell his story. If he doesn't know who he is, then he's not conscious and he can't tell his story. So, it really just blends into what you're saying now. Because now he develops that relationship of flow with the unconscious, which takes his conscious thoughts of understanding who he is in relation to the world he's in right now is not the same as when he was a child and poor. That takes consciousness. There's so many people out there that are unconscious that their situation is something else than what the illusion they tell themselves. So, for biggie to sit here and break through his own illusion and shamanism would be a shamanic journey of awakening, a new level of consciousness. I don't think it's like a stop point. It's just a benchmark, you know? And of course, I'm sure if we did like a whole entire series on Biggie's collection of songs, we could tell it even deeper, thorough story, story of how he comes into further consciousness. Because remember, this song came out when he was in the beginning. Like, he gets better. We all know that. And his consciousness and how he formulates and the collabs and it just it's all not unconscious, but it's a relationship of conscious and unconscious, which makes him awakened and more whole than he was before. I got a.

Gogoh: [00:51:07] Question. This is going to be a wrench because I know this. Mad thoughts on the table. I'm sorry but name a better Biggie song than Juicy. I was like, I like that's my that's my favorite juicy. It's my favorite biggie song. Yo, I don't, I don't know you said he, he said he gets better I'm like he. Yes. And also, I can't off the top of my head. I don't know that I can name it, but I'm sorry I didn't. I had to say that, but I know go, go enjoy.

Joël: [00:51:30] I know I gotta jump in after you Gogoh. Um, you.

Gogoh: [00:51:34] Said earlier, JP, about the materialism in the song, right? I think that the fact that he grew up without these material things. His consciousness allowed him to put them on display in this song, but once he had satisfied the materialism that he did not have, I think he was then able to focus on his storytelling ability even more. Because if you realize consciously, I don't think he got better as time went on, but his storytelling lyricism got more intricate. Because the song, the song that he told about the New York Knicks player, I forget the. Yeah, let me tell you that song even wanted to tell.

Joël: [00:52:19] Yeah.

Gogoh: [00:52:20] Thank you. Even warning. Yo, there's a red dot on your head. Listen, who thinks of this? Yo, there's a red dot on your head too. Yo, what what what what what what.

Joël: [00:52:35] Oh, so…

Gogoh: [00:52:36] And I say this because I find that the people who influenced the most influence us the most. Do not concern themselves with certain things like driving, like what they eat, like what they wear. They're not into all that stuff anymore, because consciously they have

broken away from the materialism and they are able not to focus on what matters, which is which is this. And once he got to that plane of existence, when I tell you something, I listen. They heard about the crib. You brought your moms out in Florida? The fifth corridor called the coroner. What did you tell him? Me? Yeah, me. What am I be better than you? No no no no no, it's not better than juicy. But what I'm saying, the storytelling lyricism became so intricate that. Yeah, I felt like I was sneaking to his mom's crib.

Kid Lacey: [00:53:34] Right?

Gogoh: [00:53:35] Right. What the. Dude. So, you show this his mom's crib? Yeah. I'm sure I felt like I was there. Like I got goose pimples now. Like I'm in the crib in the dark trying to find some work or something. And I think that's only because once he elevated his, his, his, his psyche, once he elevated. And you heard that storytelling really, really get deeper and deeper. Rob. Bro and I have yet to find another. Another artist. Nothing against J. Cole. Nothing. Nothing against any of the any of the new people out there. But they can't they, um.

Kid Lacey: [00:54:14] I agree.

Gogoh: [00:54:16] They just don't do it for me. Uh.

Joël: [00:54:19] I got a personal story to tell. And it's about the moving to consciousness. Consciousness. Right. But I think. For myself. I'm on a not only a spiritual journey, you know, of growth, but like, I guess, a spiritual tune, but like a healing journey from stuff I've been through. And I was speaking to my therapist. It's probably like a month or two ago. Um. And. The conscious. Like the clarity that came. Came from unconsciousness, like my unconsciousness open up. And it was about like pain and pain and stuff like that. It was specifically it was about how I deal with my own feelings. Like, I have been taught to hide my feelings. And I didn't know that until I was in a conversation with my therapist. And like, just unconsciously, she mentioned something. And then like, I just started crying, like, from nowhere. Like it just hit me that. For me to be able to live. And survive at the life that had grown up in. I had to hide all my feelings, right? But that movement of consciousness came from an unconscious space that just kind of popped open. So I'm thinking, well. Maybe we're looking at. Binaries and it's not a binary.

Gogoh: [00:56:00] Yeah. And what you're saying, the word clarity was, uh, illuminating to me as you just spoke in regards to the song. Right. Like there's this song is very clear. It's very clear. Right? It's so clear. It's like it was this. Now it's this and it's all good. It's all good. He's saying it's all good. Almost. It's just like it was always all good, right? Like it was never. Not all good. Now we just now we just came up. Right. Which is, which feels very clear again. I think that's why I resonate so deeply with so many folks within the culture and without the culture really outside the culture. Right. Like this is a this is a huge song. So I think that makes a lot of sense.

Kid Lacey: [00:56:44] Yeah. I and I agree about the, um, unconscious. Having to having to like the unconscious catalyst, like having that need to be there. Um, it's funny, I think now, like, it's gotten just much more like, I don't know, deep, deeper, or more literal, like within these words that, like we've said over this conversation. But, um, I feel like we spoke about like a switch or

like big the, the, the mode of um, flow in this song has been transitioned or the or the theme has been more so wrapped in transition. And we kind of like are trying to define like where this, you know, where that switch happens and like, uh, Joel, you telling that story kind of just like put makes that even more clearer and in kind of in a kind of like a unconscious way. Um, because I think back to what, how JP listens to music. Right? And like breaking it down into those three. And I honestly say I probably listen to music in the same way. I've just never defined it or thought about it. Um, in that sense. Um, but thinking about, okay, did big really mean to do this? Like, were they in the studio saying, oh, we're going to do this, like, and somebody's there, they're going to talk about this in classes, castes in whatever, you know, did he think he was going to you know, and we talk about and I think we can generally we can't say no, but we can generally say that we don't know. And the one thing that we know of at least as, um, you know, artists, you know, in our own right, is that, you know, and, and just people like, healing people coming like, come, like transitioning out of things and whatnot.

Kid Lacey: [00:58:24] Is that the process of unconscious can really be, you know, that turning point. Um, and I think that the as, as JP spoke about flow, um, that being an unconscious thing, like, you know, you could throw on a beat and I might not have the words for it, but I'll go, oh no, no, no, no, uh, and under my uh, like because I feel it. And I'm not even like, that's I'm not thinking about that, you know, um, and I think about how we talk about BIG's process. You know, being that, you know, this is early too, so he's not as intricate. He's not as. Oh, I know I gotta tell it like this, you know, rather than use this noun, let me tell it. Let me say the brand, let me blah blah blah. Like for storytelling. He hasn't even thought about that in the storytelling sense. This is him just being unconscious. Um, but tapping into I guess you know what he's seen, what he knows, you know, and the life that that he was, you know, living then, um, yeah, that like, I, I did not I did not I mean, that's just like the main point. I just didn't think that it would, um, that we would talk so much about the conscious, you know, and the unconscious, uh, self. But, um, I think the, the actions within those, uh, worlds are really, really poignant, too, because, you know, who knows? Like, I doubt big spent too much time writing this, you know, he lived it at the time. So, it was like, probably like second nature to him, you know?

Joël: [00:59:51] Thank you, thank you. It's all good. It's all good. Baby, baby. Thanks a lot guys. I really appreciate y'all. I hope you hold it in your heart to to join us again. I really had a lot of fun with you.

C.R.E.A.M.

Joël: [00:00:00] Welcome to Hip Hop and Theology, a space of theological and decolonizing thoughts that attempts to increase humanity through the theo-poetics of hip hop and theology. I'm excited to get into today's dialogue. Let's get into it. Welcome back for a new episode of hip Hop and theology with Joe, Arin Gogo and two of our guests. We have Mohammed; Mo man I've known for 31 years of my life, went to high school together. He's a Renaissance man. Films, music, you know? Director, four-part harmony. If you need that, you can call me. Okay. All right. And also told me it's not true, I forgot comedy. What was that? I forgot comedy, a comedian, a comedy. Clubs. There we go. Yeah. And, uh, also we have Roosevelt, um, seminarian buddy, school friend. Um, I gotta, I gotta pull up your, your hefty resume, sir, so I could tell. I could tell the peoples who we got on here. Oh. Well, so I can give them some history.

Roosevelt: [00:01:17] Signed to capital Records in the mid to late 80s with a group called. And, uh, the first hit record was Fly Girl, which came out in the summer of 85. And that record and Dougie Fresh to show were like the hottest records, uh, in the country. Um, I did two LPs with the group, and before the third LP, I dispersed due to a conflict of interest between, uh, production and myself. Uh, basically, production tried to paint this picture like, uh, you know, Boogie Night, God rest his soul, uh, kicked me out of the group. But all of that was brought on by our producers because we were being screwed out of our publishing. And I was fortunate enough to surround myself with people that really, uh, taught me the business. And so the more knowledge I gained, the more of a threat I became. Yeah. So that that. That's it in a nutshell.

Joël: [00:02:21] As I said before, part of this is I've been using hip hop and theology and studying, studying and particularly, um, for my dissertation. And just to retract a little bit as I'm tying hip hop theology both to decolonization, that the decolonization is the idea of dismantling a colonial system. Right? You do it through culture, through economic domination, political

power. That's what the colonial system uses and decolonizing that is entrenched. I believe in both religion and in hip hop, and that's why we're here. I think about religion. You have the Abrahamic traditions where a bulk of the teachings, whether in Islam, Judaism, um, or Christian, is really, you know, that to love and to work towards justice and, you know, that's found within those. And I think similarly, you find that in hip hop. And today I want to delve into or dive into, um, the song Cream by Go, go Deep into it, cream by Wu-Tang and see where that decolonization happens. Do we need to hear the song one time? Before we before we continue.

Roosevelt: [00:03:53] Sure you can. Please.

WuTang: [00:03:58] Cash rules everything around me. Get the money. Dollar, dollar bill, y'all. I grew up on the crime side.

WuTang: [00:04:19] The New York Times side. Staying alive was no job at second hand. Moms bounced on old man. So then we moved to shining Land. A young duke, you're rocking the gold tooth. Little goose. Only way I begin the giokas drug loop. And let's start it like this, son. Rolling with this one and that one. Pulling out gats. Bigfoot. But it was just a dream for the teen who was a fiend. Started smoking wolves at six. Running up in gates and doing hits for high stakes, making my way on five skates. No question. I would speed for cracks and weed. The combination made my eyes bleed. No question. I would flow off and try to get the dough off sticking up right boys and boy. My life got no better. Same damn low sweater. Times is rough and tough like leather. Figured out I went the wrong route. So, I got with a sick tight clique and went all out. Catching keys from Cross keys rolling in their PPVs every week. We made 40 G's. Yo, brothers, respect mine and hit the deck now. Babu from the gate now rules everything around me. Cream. Get the money. Dollar, dollar bill, y'all. Everything around me. Cream. Get the money.

[00:05:30] Dollar, dollar bill, y'all. It's the 22 long hard years are still struggling.

WuTang: [00:05:34] Survival got me bugging, but I'm alive. On arrival I'll be back to shape. For the streets to stay awake to the ways of the world a man with the dream. With plans to make cream with fell. I went to jail.

[00:05:46] At the age of 15. A young boy selling drugs and such who never had much trying to get a clutch and what I could not touch to play me. So now I face incarceration, pacing.

WuTang: [00:05:56] No one else. Saints my destination make up the back of a bus. 40 of us. Life as a shorty shouldn't be so rough. But as the world turned, I learned life was hell. Living in the world no different from myself. Everyday I escape from Jakes. Giving chase. Selling base, smoking bones in the staircase I don't know why I chose to smoke I guess that's the time when I'm not depressed. But I'm still depressed. And I ask what's it worth? Ready to give up? So, I seek the old earth. Who is to blame? Working hard may help you maintain, to learn, to overcome the heartaches and pain we got. Nick. Kids grew up cops and crack rocks and spray shots. All of the block stays hot. Leave it up to me while I be living. Proof to kick the truth. To the young black youth and shorties running wild. Smoking sets. Drinking beer. It ain't tryin to hear what I'm kicking in, is it? Neglect it for now. But yo, it gots to be accepted.

[00:06:50] That what the life is hectic cash rules everything around me. Cream get the money.

WuTang: [00:06:55] Dollar, dollar bill, y'all.

[00:06:57] Cash rules everything around me. Cream get the money. Dollar, dollar bill. Y'all cash everything around me.

WuTang: [00:07:04] Cream. Get the money. Dollar, dollar bill, y'all. Cash rules everything around me. Cream. Get the money.

[00:07:11] Dollar, dollar bill, y'all. Still get to take the. Barstools. Everything around me. Cream.

WuTang: [00:07:26] Get the money. Dollar, dollar bill, y'all. Cash moves everything around me. Cream. Get the money. Dollar, dollar bill, y'all. Cash rules everything around me. Cream. Get the money. Dollar, dollar bill, y'all. Cash wants everything around me. Cream. Get the money. Dollar, dollar bill, y'all. Oh, yeah.

Joël: [00:07:49] Thank you. Aaron. Just listening to this again. Made me think about how. Cash is really ruled everything around me my whole life, both materially and spiritually, you know. And I thought maybe we could first delve into some of the, some of the lyrics that, like, first catches us in, in, um, in the song. And I'll start off, I'll start off with like the first thing that pops off right at the beginning. I grew up on the crime side, you know, and then right after that had second hands. I don't know how many of us here, but I think that is a life that I lived, that that's a life I lived. And living it means making some wrong choices. Thinking about making wrong choices like, this is what I was. But I for a long time I considered just like jumping into the game and I, I had people around me that were like, man, you might see the car I'm driving, but it's not worth it. And every time I seriously thought about it, like one of those people in my life that were lucky enough to get out and tell me what it was about, we're like, nah, you know, stay where you are. It's safe here. It's good here. What you see ain't worth it.

Roosevelt: [00:09:19] It’s interesting because he basically is saying he was a product of his environment and sometimes, you know. Uh proverb says, uh, pride goes before the fall. And you know, if you when you're in situations where you feel like, yo, there's got to be something better than this. Like, I'm, you know, I'm watching everybody else around me. God, everybody's getting paper. I'm walking around with. I got, I got my brother's clothes on. Right. And now, you know, like, they making fun of me in school. And so it, you know, apparently there was no, there was no foundation to begin with. And so, because there was no foundation, he was easily persuaded to live that life that everybody's not cut out for, you know. Um, I lived that life for a brief moment. Um, but I'm a free spirit. And I realized that I couldn't live my life looking over my shoulders. It was like, nah, this ain't for me. Because once you reach a certain point in the game, you know cats are coming for you because they want what you have. I'm grateful that there was a foundation, you know? Uh, and so training a child up in the way, once they grow old, they shall not depart. And if it wasn't for that foundation, you know, I could be one of those cats that's no longer here.

Gogoh: [00:11:09] It's different for me. Um, I left Nigeria being the same as everyone else to get here and be on the bottom. Um, it's when you're when you're an immigrant, you know, there are class systems you deal with. Uh, you know, some are based on economics, some are just based on on the family you're born into. But for the most part, you are the same as whoever's around you. Um, there is no one gene off in the village. Everybody is the same. Um, then I get here. And I went from Nnabu to the African kid. So now it's, you know, it's demarcated who I am, what I am, what I wear, what I can afford. So. And I didn't have a basis to say what this guy is doing is wrong or right. I just saw that these people live better than we did. That's all I saw. And being the eldest, you know, the eldest male in the family, the eldest son, um, I had no one above me to really say, you know, yo, don't do this. Yo don't do that. Don't hang with these people. Don't. So, I kind of had to fumble my way in the darkness, you know, on my own to figure things out. And of course, I eventually figured out, but it came with the bumps and bruises, you know, getting in trouble, doing whatever.

Gogoh: [00:12:38] Um, and the only reason I didn't have second hands is because I was the oldest. So, I got the first hand and passed it down. And I mean, my, my, my next younger brother is seven years my junior. So, it was holding on to whatever clothes that I didn't destroy that he eventually got, however many years later until, um, our family kind of like got our legs in this country. And while I have both parents in the home, they were emotionally in the house, but they weren't physically in the house because they were always working. So, I understand, um, how Wu-Tang, you know, came about. I understand why they, you know, and I don't want to say ended up, but why they are where they are and how. Because I could have easily been there myself. And it's not because I didn't have both parents, but it's because both parents were here. But they had to go make a living, you know? So sometimes, you know, idle hands will find trouble. Um, but, you know, to Roosevelt's point. Thank God I was trained up a particular way. And eventually, you know, it kicked in, you know, took a couple of bumps over the head. Um, but it kicked in soon enough where I wasn't. I hadn't fallen, you know, too far.

Mo: [00:13:56] I was a good kid. I didn't do, I didn't do. I was, uh, maybe sheltered, so, I don't know.

Joël: [00:14:03] It wasn't particularly about this, like the lyrics.

Mo: [00:14:08] Um, no, it's, uh, I don't know if I throw away. I'm. And I speak as a real estate person. Um, so if I say anything anti-capitalist, it might sound a little hypocritical, but, like, you gotta you gotta make money no matter how. You gotta survive, right? I don't blame people that try to hustle. I mean, we grew up in the 90s, right? Where everybody was hustling, you know, like, uh, I, too, a son of a son of immigrants, right? People hustle like, so. However, you can get, however you can get paid, however you can survive. It's no judgment calls, honestly. Like we got we have, um, people who play by the capitalist rules, and we have people who are billionaires outside of it. So, I can't criticize the Wu-Tang for, uh, pointing out certain things in CREAM.

Joël: [00:15:13] But I think when it goes back a couple of verses later that, you know, "survivor got me bugging, but I'm alive on arrival, I peopled the shape of the streets and I stay awake to the ways of the world. This shit is deep." Like that is, for me, a theological shift. If I could put it like

that. Because after all the struggle, for me that “I'm alive on arrival” is like a rebirth, right. And as you know, a child, you're alive as soon as you come out, as soon as they cut you open, that however way you come out, you are alive, and you literally start to notice people the shapes around you. So, I think in this way it's leading to a further shift in this song that's profound.

Roosevelt: [00:16:17] And you know what you made me think about? You made me think about the 22nd song and at first read of the text, we, we believe that it is a psalm of Forsakenness. And then we recall that these are the these this is the fourth word that Jesus cries out from the cross. But if you're looking at this text through the eyes of antiquity, they didn't have Bibles, and only religious leaders or people in positions of power had access to scrolls. But most common people memorize the sacred text. So, when Jesus is saying, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” I believe he's giving us a glimpse into something else that's going on and we get thrown off by my God. My God, right now, we're all we're all theologians. Uh, you know, we're all exegetical exegetically. Uh, verse. And so, we understand that there's an issue with the text and the issue with the text is that, um, it's being translated in Greek, but Jesus spoke Aramaic. And so, when you translate, “my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me” in Aramaic, it would translate that God forsakes with a divine purpose. However, we understand because we’ve read the entire Psalm that it's not a psalm of Forsakenness, but it's a psalm of deliverance.

Roosevelt: [00:18:19] So wait a second. David had to go through a moment of forsakenness in order to recognize that even in my moments when I feel like I'm alone, I'm not alone because God will deliver me. And guess what? After the 22nd Psalm comes the 23rd Psalm. And it’s in the 23rd Psalm, where David says, yea, “though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil, for thou art with me.” And so, this shifting that's taking place, he understands that there's something greater, because I've been able to move through situations that should have taken me out. And so, when we look at the 23rd Psalm, David is in a place where he's like, listen, I know that in my valley moments, I'm not concerned about the things that are surrounding me, because the one that is walking with me is able to control the outcome of the circumstances that surround me. So, when you when you made that statement, that's what it made me think about. And the fact that there is there is a higher level of, of consciousness on, on the lyricist part to recognize that. Yeah, I made it through this, but I know I didn't make it through this on my own.

Gogoh: [00:19:53] It’s interesting you relate this to the 22nd and 23rd Psalm because it when you when you read through the lyrics, you can see how each individual artist takes you through their story. And the stories are they're not eerily similar. They're almost identical, although the wordplay is different. Uh, if you go as far as, um, I believe it's the, um, the first couple of bars. Um. Figured out I went the wrong route. So, I got with a sit tight click and went all out. It takes some doing to understand that either what you were doing with one crew was wrong. And the formation of another crew was best, or that what you were doing alone was dangerous. It made sense to join forces, whether just for the making money value or for safety value. And to give nod to that also. If you relate it back to the Psalms, you know, you kind of figured out, okay, well, I wasn’t doing so well before because you’re, you know, when you think back to Christ asking why he had been forsaken, but then. As you put it, when David writes the 23rd Psalm, it’s kind of like, oh, I’m acknowledging that while I’ve done all this stuff, while I felt this way, while I’m having my valley moments, while I’m going, going through the valley of the shadow of

death, I won’t fear. So, although God has your back, you know, I can also see how that that reflects in the click having your back as well. You’re made to understand that you’re not walking alone, whether it’s religiously or literally. You know whether it's in the church or the streets of Shaolin. You’re not doing this by yourself.

Roosevelt: [00:21:46] I like that, brother, and I just want to add to that in the 22nd. When Jesus finds out what he's what he's this is. And this is just my own. This is the gospel according to Roosevelt. Sharif. I believe that what Jesus is saying is that, yeah, the best is yet to come. And in this moment, this is a painful moment. But this is what I came for. I'm built for this. However, I know that the God that I serve, even in my forsaken moment, he's working on my behalf. And so I just need to push past this moment. And once I push past this moment, you will see what the outcome will be, because God will take our painful exit and turn it around into our triumphant re-entry.

Aaron: [00:22:48] Yeah. That's dope, that's dope. Thank you. We wanted to contribute. CREAM is interesting because it's hyper focusing on cash money. All money is not cash. You know there's different forms of money. So, like there's hyper focus of cash. The dollar the US dollar you know it the poetically makes us think of the God in which we trust on the dollar bill. Um, and then that God is in question. Who is that? God? You know, and then we think about mammon, right? Like this God of money. And we think about 16th century, how somehow Christian doctrine authorizes slavery as a just way of doing economy, um, and how cash is assigned or directly tied to the value of labor. But this is 400 years of free labor. So, all that cash that then becomes, you know, the American dollar, you know, it's just weird deal poetically how that lines up in the sense of this whole entire time, this image of God that is focused on the power through money is like now kind of preached or given to people in poor situations or the ghettos, you know? And then from there we're constantly, you know, maybe even praising, not knowing unconsciously that we're praising and worshiping a deity of God, uh, perspective of God that focuses on money and how money moves the world, you know? But theologically, you know, God is not just all about money. Um, this is the cash idea is like this man made, uh, idea.

Aaron: [00:24:49] Right? And it's used as a form of bartering. But it's interesting how even now, as we are recording this podcast, the US cash dollar is on the verge of becoming worth nothing. And so, you know, I for me, as a field poet, I feel poetically think about this stuff. And I don't think that it's far off. I think it's interconnected and very interesting. You know that even the form of money that we use has been colonized in a way, and even how we use money or how we acquire money, do business, you know, with our neighbors, you know, um, bartering, even keeping up a new form of economy, if it comes down to that. Like we have to rethink that. That has to be decolonized, like this idea of cash and the power it's had over us for so long. You know, um, a lot of us have even valued ourselves based on cash. The US dollar, you know, and, you know, coming from upbringings in the hood where storing your cash in your mattress was legit, you know, like, it's just interesting how we've used cash and we've killed for cash, and we've fought for cash. We've given cash out of love, and we've even told our next generation of kids to make sure you accumulate cash, you know, like, or you get a job that pays you well in cash. You know, and it's just, I don't know, crazy. What do you guys think that.

Joël: [00:26:29] Leads to a question that I, that ties maybe this, I think, Aaron, where you went and where we were. There are some lyrics that cross that kind of shifted a couple of two different verses, but it says. But as the world turned, I learned life was hell. Live in the world. No different from a cell after you skip, who explained working hard may help you maintain, to learn, to overcome, overcome the heartaches and pain. When you put that together. I see a crossing from the cream we were talking about. And the cream you were talking about. Aaron. And for me? Did it happen too long ago? For me, it was like a spiritual journey. Almost. Um. Where? I started working when I was maybe seven years old, and I've been working the whole time unless I was sick. Something like that. Um. And I started to realize that I had been working all this time, and the money I had acquired was gone because I was poor and everything cost so much, and I had to raise a child for part of it by myself. And then like, life happened, like, and I got to a space where I was like. We know. You started this spiritual journey in school, but it's taken you to another place where? Isn't the same. Like that cash like that isn't the same. It shifted to, uh. Better life. You know, like, weren't able to be yourself. More able to heal from wounds, more able to like. I don't know. Walk naked in your house, sit down, you know, in your boxers, whatever. Just like it's shifted to a place like that. And I actually think that is a real theological place. So, if there's something like that for you, what's that shift for you?

Gogoh: [00:29:03] I don't think there's anything necessarily like that for me, but I can relate your experience right now back to the song. Um, leave it up to me while I be living proof to kick the truth to the young black youth. You're at the point where you've gathered enough information, you've gathered enough experience, and dare I say, enough cash to be able to now sit back and impart that to your kids. You know, so you have the ability now to not just, um, speak the truth to them, but you have the ability because of how you were raised and how you've chosen to raise them, to literally sit them down and show them what you had to get up and walk through. And I think that that new level of freedom, whether it's by virtue of just life experience and or education or specifically theological education, it puts you in a different realm of thinking where it's not just about, yo, don't do this, yo, don't do that. It's look at my example. I'm sure Lou remembers how you guys were when he was young. So he has that visceral reaction to certain stimulus, right? And that stimulus should be able to drive him to not just to remember where he once was, but to hopefully to not repeat the process or processes that landed you and him in the condition and state you were in earlier.

Gogoh: [00:30:28] However, you still have to. You still have to understand that you are still entangled. With cash, you know, because you can't walk around naked in your house without cash. Without cash, you have no house to walk around in. Without cash, you have no no means of buying those boxes that you're sitting in. Without cash, there's no couch to sit with your son and your daughter on to explain to them all this stuff. So as much as you are without that system, you're still completely entangled within it. I think the difference now, though, is the mindset with which you. You either acquiesce to the system or allow the system to exist. As far removed as possible, while still having some type of sway in your everyday life because it always will. We all. You know, we all I don't want to say live and live and die by the dollar, but we all are affected by it.

Mo: [00:31:33] I'll chime in, uh, to represent Ghostface, um, as a fellow Muslim. Um, because someone got to represent Ghostface Killah in this one. Um, we have a thing in Islam, um, about

called Dunya, which means world, but also means material. Um, and you're not supposed to put Dunya over Ashura, which is the world over, um, the hereafter, like, we're here, and we're not supposed to be so tethered to a lot of the worldly sort of possessions, like, it's. I mean, uh, Christianity started off as an eastern of a lot of philosophical, uh, religion. The same thing with Islam before they just blew up his world, like, uh, competing to be like, okay, we got 2 billion, you got 2 billion people. But they both start off with this, like, deep spiritual sort of need of trying to make sense in, um, in a world that's a bit too materialistic, like, um, or at least and correct me if I'm wrong. I mean, the story of Jesus at the temple was that he got mad when he saw that people were being charged to wash before prayer, right? Like the Romans couldn't mess with people praying per se, but if they taxed people to wash up before entering the temple, you know they found a little loophole. Jesus throws an actual righteous fit and, you know, flips the money collector's table more like the cashier's table, you know? And, uh, Islam started as a poor people's, um, a poor people's revolution were because Mecca was the center of, uh, of Arabian paganism. So, like the Kaaba, I don't know if you ever see images of Mecca people swirling around the, um, doing, um, you know, going around the Kaaba seven times.

Mo: [00:33:32] You have to do that, like, once in your life. And, um, it was the center of, uh, it was the center of Arab paganism. But that also meant that the people in the top. Right, because there were a lot of, uh, tourists that were visiting Mecca, um, from all across the Middle East, um, for whatever pagan rituals that they need. And that made a lot of people money. And then Muhammad, coming from a somewhat upper-class background, the Prophet Muhammad coming from a somewhat not me, the Prophet Muhammad. Sorry. So, uh, to emphasize a somewhat middle-class background and realizing that this whole thing is kind of crazy, um, because the top is literally putting a chokehold on the poor. And the first people that go, you know, we're going to do monotheism now are the poor, the people, because they realize that this is a way of rebelling against the system, um, against the materialistic system that's oppressing them. Um, you know, so they come from these deeply spiritual meanings, uh, the places um, so in we were raised to believe that you're not supposed to be so tethered, even though a lot of people obviously. I mean, you've been to Dubai, that's a Muslim area. And, you know, they're not, uh, they're not too worried about the end, uh, you know, what's going on in the other side of death? Um, they're all really clinging on to their materialistic, uh, ways.

Mo: [00:35:00] So I this is just to me chiming in, just, uh, throwing in the saying that I'm representing Ghostface as a fellow Muslim here. And I will probably be, uh, speaking about this concept. And it's and it plays a lot into the song, you know, like you become a little bit more wiser, right? When we get to a certain age, hopefully you're wise enough to realize that, like, yeah, you need the money to kind of survive. You need the money to pay rent and to buy food. This is America, right? You need a roof over your head, clothes on your back. But at some point, this is all kind of BS. You know, I kind of going through the motions. And the most important thing eventually is coming from our perspective. Um, is that your relationship with, uh, God and people should be based on not praying to him and going, hey, can I get a new, uh, Bugatti? You know, um, I would like to drive a car and have lots of ladies. Um, but it should be based on, like, I hope I'm doing good. You know, like, I hope people are happy that I exist. And I'm doing things to make them happy that they exist. So then when time comes and we no longer exist, that, you know, and we're in the whatever you call heaven or the next dimension or whatever it

is, right? That the being good was the thing that was that that was. Worth it. Not the. Not the chase.

Roosevelt: [00:36:31] I just wanted to thank you, Muhammad, because you made me think about the fact that, um. Number one, I've never seen a U-Haul truck riding behind a hearse before. Because at the end of the day, you know, nothing we gain here. Can we take with us? Um, and I'm also reminded of what Jesus said, uh, when they were trying to trap him off, uh, about, uh, money. And he said, well, who's on the coin? And Caesar. Yeah, exactly. So, render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and give unto God what is God? Uh, but rewinding back to what you first said, uh, it's interesting when every time I read that text, when he, he beats the, the, uh, money changers and chases them out of the church. He calls them venomous snakes. You venomous snakes. You turned my father's house into a den of thieves. And I think when we come to a place where, um, money becomes the center of everything, uh, then we devalue our true identity as being created in the image and likeness of God and as, uh, as my brother ghost said earlier. Yeah, we need money to pay bills. Um, you know, to maintain.

Roosevelt: [00:38:20] Because without it, yeah, we would not have a place to stay. Uh, we couldn't walk around with no clothes on. Uh, but money should not be the end all. Be all. And I think that our understanding, like many of us, were not really taught. Um, you know, how to manage money wisely. And I think that when we, you know, when we look at people, there's a difference between being rich and being wealthy, right? So, Shaquille O'Neal is rich, but the person that writes his check is wealthy. Right. And so many of us here, uh, did not come from, uh, you know, many of our parents may have not taught us how to understand managing money. And most wealthy people did not. You know, they don't sleep, eat, and drink money because they're there's a certain comfort in recognizing that. Yeah, I'm good. But for those of us who have had to struggle, and we know what it's like, uh, to rob Peter to pay Paul, uh, we are constantly placed in situations where, um, our theology becomes questionable because it's like, okay, are you serving God or are you serving money?

Joël: [00:40:03] You know, that reminds me, it ties into, for me of the *imago* Dei that we're made in image, likeness. We're made into imitation of God and how the intertwining happens right there.

Gogoh: [00:40:22] I think at some point, um. When the realization of your willful participation in empire, in capitalism, uh, when it really dawns on you what happens is going back to the line I used earlier, when you try to kick the truth to the young black youth. Um, at some point you may you you'll probably realize that it may be too late to save 1 or 2 of them because shorty's running a while, smoking sex, drinking beer. Ain't trying to hear what I'm kicking in his ear. Neglected for now. But yo, it's got to be accepted. That what? That life is hectic. So, there are times where you'll have the presence of mind to attempt to pass on that knowledge. However, if you're wrapped up in it so far where you've either mismanaged funds. To your point, Roosevelt, because not all of us had parents who had money or the wherewithal of those who had money to pass it on to us, you know, financial literacy and the like. But for those of us, you know, who didn't have parents with money, we also didn't have the benefit of sitting down with mom and dad to learn how to write a check, you know, or if we did have the benefit to sit down and write a check. Was there anything in the account to cover the check? You know, so just because you had

a checkbook and the ability to write a check, the knowledge to write a check doesn't mean there was anything to support that check once you had written it, you know? So, the existence is layered upon so many what ifs, you know, that is due, you know, cable is due, and you have to have these trappings now because to, to continue to exist in this empire, capitalist driven society, there are certain minimums you have to have.

Gogoh: [00:42:19] And living in the hood, it's one thing to have the minimum, but you can't have an iPhone six. You got to have an iPhone ten, you know, because of course people will make fun of you, number one. But to show you how things work even further, the older iPhones are not even supported. So you don't have a choice but to keep up. You don't have a choice, but to maintain a certain level of empire within your own, within your own home. You know you don't have the benefit of choosing a $40 cable package anymore. Everything is $120 or. I just had this conversation with my mother today. She owes Cablevision $300 and it's just her in the house. What is she watching? Nothing, but it's the package that she had to get based on her needs, you know? So again, you do your best to try to, um, live on the fringes of, if not outside of empire and capitalism, but because of cream, because cash rules everything around you. It affects the company to the point where they impact and affect you. So, it doesn't really explain anything, but it just shows you how like what was the movie, um, with Casino, Scarface? Is it Scarface or. No, I think it was, um, the one with, um, Tony. Anyway, you know, as the more you're trying to get out, the more they pull you back in, you know? So you really don't have much of a choice where cream is concerned. You need it. Cash does pretty much rule everything.

Roosevelt: [00:43:55] That was God, brother.

Gogoh: [00:43:57] God. Thank you, thank you. Yeah.

Roosevelt: [00:44:00] Yeah.

Mo: [00:44:01] Hey. Yeah.

Gogoh: [00:44:04] You know.

Joël: [00:44:07] That's it. That's the drop the mic. You took it all the way around to the end.

Roosevelt: [00:44:11] I thank you all for letting me be a part of this discussion. Um, you know, it's interesting. I put a patent on it. On a name. Um, uh, maybe six months to a year ago. Uh, from hip hop to Hallelujah. And the whole premise is to empower, uh, our young people basically using my, my ties in the rap game, so to speak. Um, but this has been very enlightening on many levels. Uh, brother Aaron, brother Muhammad, brother Joe and my brother go, uh, love you, brothers to life, man.

Joël: [00:44:57] Love you too, man. Love you. I hope you join us again.

Roosevelt: [00:45:01] Yes, brother Mohammed. As-salamu alaykum. My brother.

Mo: [00:45:06] Like I said, I'm brother. Yeah.

Roosevelt: [00:45:09] Listen, if you show me a Muslim, I'll show you a Christian. And if you show me a Christian, I'll show you a Muslim. We have more commonalities and differences. I didn't learn anything from knights. Uh, what I did learn. Was to embrace, uh, because we there's so much that we can learn from one another. Uh, but we just have to have an open mind, uh, to recognize that there are more commonalities and differences.

Mo: [00:45:44] Hey, I've known Joel. How many years you adjust, man? How many years I've ever known you. 31 years. 31 years. Yeah.

Gogoh: [00:45:51] And you're still his friend Muhammad.

Mo: [00:45:54] You know, I have you know, I'm just.

Mo: [00:45:58] I have poor taste.

Roosevelt: [00:46:03] Are you.

Mo: [00:46:03] And he and he. And he does.

Mo: [00:46:06] Too. That's.

Mo: [00:46:07] You know.

Roosevelt: [00:46:09] Well, I'm gonna tell you something about brother Joel.

Mo: [00:46:12] Um, yeah.

Roosevelt: [00:46:14] I can never repay him, uh, because he. And, uh, I'm saying this publicly. Uh, he really helped me during a rough patch at seminary and basically, um. Four people had passed away in a span of three years. And, uh, I was in the midst of we were doing a was it a Black Lives Matter class? Yes. Yeah. And I was doing a paper for our professor, and, and I was all over the place. I mean, my head was all over the place, and, uh, Joel took my paper and basically edited it for me, and he didn't have to do that, you know, uh, and so I thank you publicly, my brother, for helping me during a very pivotal time, uh, in my seminary journey.

Gogoh: [00:47:16] Well, since we're giving flowers, um, I'm not going to talk about Aaron and Joel because I met these two brothers. Um, I met them in, um. I met them in the civil rights class. Oh, that's Aaron, Joel, and Imena. Because I saw her earlier. Uh, Joel's daughter. I met them all. But one thing I will say to you, uh, Roosevelt, uh, publicly as well, is that I had maybe two conversations with you. Uh, one was just in passing because I was talking to. I forget who I was talking to, and you knew them anyway. And then we had a one on one. And everyone here knows. Well, Muhammad. Maybe not, but, um. When my wife passed. I knew Joe and Aaron would be around because we had formed a friendship. But I have to tell you that for someone who I had really no ties to. The text you will send me in the morning. The calls you would you'd make for me. The way you spoke life back into me. I there's nothing that can be said because you

took up a space in my life that people who knew me all of my life should have been doing, but failed to, you know. So, I have to give you your flowers as you're here because I can't imagine, um, where I would have been. I'm sure Joe and Aaron would have. They still do what they do for me.

Mo: [00:48:45] Right.

Gogoh: [00:48:46] But for someone who had no reason to, um, no cause to know. You're just being yourself. You know? I have to thank you, brother. I have to really, really Thank you.

Roosevelt: [00:48:59] No, thanks is necessary. And there was a cause. And the cause was, uh, to be like. Jesus. Uh, you know, when I leave this place. My goal is to leave this place better than it was, uh, before I came. And I think that I can speak for us all on that note. And it's important. And I've often said this, that we are we will forever be connected because there are things that we will go through, uh, as followers of the master teacher that no one else will be able to understand except those that are going through it. And that's why, uh, I think it's important, uh, for us to continue to sharpen one another, especially in this season. Uh, because the enemy recognizes that his time is running out.

Roosevelt: [00:50:12] And it is important that we sharpen one another and, recognize that even though loneliness is a state of mind, you're never alone. And again, I go back to that 22nd Psalm. You know, when Jesus cries out, uh, you know, theologians have argued this for, for centuries and someone could say, well, in that moment, you know, Jesus felt alone and maybe he did. Maybe he did. But loneliness is a state of mind and I it I, I cannot really subscribe to the thought that Jesus cried that out because he really felt forsaken. Because when I read the text, it's a text of deliverance. And even in God's silence, God is still working on our behalf.

Roosevelt: [00:51:11] Mhm.

Roosevelt: [00:51:13] We just have to recognize that God is there. So, I was just doing what was pressed on my spirit to do. Brother. I love you, man. I love you and I; I cannot imagine what that must have been like. And I think as ministers, a lot of times we think that that's the time for us to put all kind of eloquent words together and dress them up. No, man, shut up and be present. If I hear one more time, weeping may endure for a night. Good morning. Yeah.

Gogoh: [00:51:50] Um, yeah.

Gogoh: [00:51:51] I'm still waiting for that morning.

Roosevelt: [00:51:52] Yeah. Let me catch you outside the church and say that to me.

Gogoh: [00:52:03] Yeah.

Roosevelt: [00:52:04] But, Joel, I apologize, man.

Joël: [00:52:11] No. No apologies necessary. We good!

Appendix D: Black Church: White Religion Class Outline

BLACK CHURCH, WHITE RELIGION

THE DECOLONIZATION AND RECONCILIATION OF THE BLACK CHURCH

L. Joël Dautruche, ***Doctor of Ministry candidate.***

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INTRODUCTION

God-of-the-Angel-Armies, come back! Smile your blessed smile: That will be our salvation. Remember how you brought a young vine from Egypt, cleared out the brambles and briers, and planted your very own vineyard? You prepared the good earth; you planted her roots deep; the vineyard filled the land. Your vine soared high and shaded the mountains, even dwarfing the giant cedars. Your vine ranged west to the Sea, east to the River So why do you no longer protect your vine? Trespassers pick its grapes at will; Wild pigs crash through and crush it, and the mice nibble away at what's left. God-of-the-Angel-Armies, turn our way! Take a good look at what's happenedand attend to this vine. Care for what you once tenderly planted the vine you raised from a shoot. And those who dared to set it on fire give them a look that will kill! Then take the hand of your once-favorite child, the child you raised to adulthood. We will never turn our back on you; breathe life into our lungs so we can shout your name! God, God-of-the-Angel-Armies, come back! Smile your blessing smile: God-of-the-Angel-Armies, come back! Smile your blessing smile: That will beour salvation." (Psalm 80: 7-19 MSG).

"The Spirit of the LORD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD,and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified." (Isaiah 61:1-3 The Negro Bible).

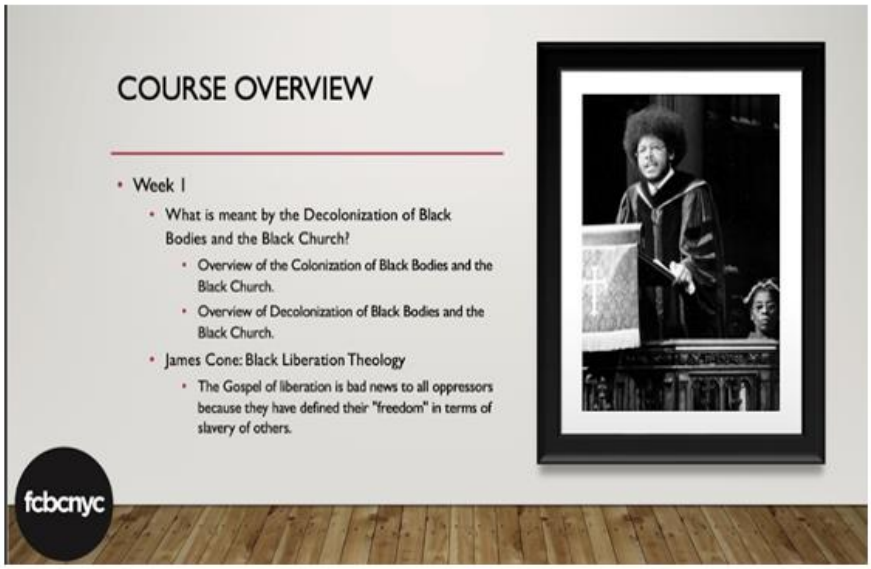
- Welcome to the Clean *Pain: The Decolonization & Reconciliation of the Black Church* journey.
- I am *L.* Joël *Dautruche*, and like many of you, I too, stand at the crossroads of multiple identities, and my experiences in this role has ignited a passion for justice that fuels my scholarship, and it is with great honor and humility that I assume the responsibility of guiding us through this transformative journey.
- I received my Master of Divinity from New York Theological Seminary (NYTS), where my studies centered around Black Liberation Theology and Process Theology.

It was during this time that I was deeply honored to receive the President's Award for my efforts in highlighting the critical intersection of faith, racial justice, and systemic change. Currently, I am a doctoral student at NYTS, where my focus is on the interplay of race, power, theology, and the dynamics of decolonization within the Black Church. I am thrilled to share and shape this journey with all of you.

- Over the years, I have had the privilege of serving as a research assistant to several NYTS professors, the Dean, and the President of NYTS. In these roles, I have participated in the creation of a Doctor of Ministry (DMin) cohort focusing on Social Justice, thus further merging my commitment to justice with the realm of theological studies. I've also had the distinct honor of serving as the Teaching Assistant to several professors, including the President of NYTS. These experiences have instilled in me a deep respect for the process of learning and a profound commitment to facilitating that process for others.
- I look forward to engaging with each of you in this exploration of our shared history, our present realities, and our collective future. I encourage you to enter this space with open minds, receptive hearts, and the readiness to challenge and be challenged.
- Our journey together will be one of unveiling,

understanding, and ultimately, liberation.

- Let us embark on this path of decolonization with the conviction that our collective engagement can lead us to a more equitable, inclusive, and just world.
- Thank you for your consideration,
  L. Joël Dautruche


COURSE OVERVIEW
• Week 1
• What is meant by the Decolonization of Black Bodies and the Black Church?
• Overview of the Colonization of Black Bodies and the Black Church.
• Overview of Decolonization of Black Bodies and the Black Church.
• James Cone: Black Liberation Theology
• The Gospel of liberation is bad news to all oppressors because they have defined their "freedom" in terms of slavery of others.
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Week 1

ONE

What This Book Means By "BLACK".

What makes a person 'Black' in the colonizer's eye, or in his/her thought, is a complex and contestedone. Why? It reflects the history of racial classification and the legacy of colonialism and white supremacy. In the context of the United States, the concept of race developed out of a system

of slaverythat was based on the exploitation and control of Black bodies. The ‘one-drop rule’, whichoriginated in the United States in the 19th century, was a legal and social principle that defined a person as ‘Black’ if he/she had any known Black ancestry, regardless of his/her appearance or other social factors. This ‘one-drop-rule’ [system] was used to justify the enslavement and oppression of Black people and to reinforce the idea of white supremacy.

In the colonial context, the categorization of people into racial groups was often based on physical appearance, cultural practices, and other markers of difference. Europeans imposed their own racial classifications onto the populations they colonized, often creating new racial categoriesthat did not exist prior to colonization. These categories were used to justify the subjugation and exploitation of non-European peoples and to reinforce the idea of European superiority.

The legacy of colonialism and white supremacy has had a lasting impact on how people are classified racially. While race is a socially constructed concept, it continues to have real-world consequences on people's lives, shaping their experiences of discrimination, inequality, andviolence.

Blackness, Oppression, and Ghetto Are Intertwined!

James Cone:

Blackness is a condition of human existence that can never be erased, for it announces a specific difference in human beings necessary for human freedom. (Cone, 2019)

● The ghetto, far from being an accidental occurrence, is the natural and inevitable consequence of a racist society. (Cone, Black Theology and Black Power, 2019), p. 62)

Howard Thurman:

I am a Negro, not because of my skin, but because of certain historic conditions… Blackness is not the skin pigment that makes the Negro, but the nature of the soul…. Blackness is a way of being grounded in the experience of survival in the face of brutality (Thurman, 1996).

● The ghetto is a prison for those who have already been sentenced. (Thurman, 1996)

W.E.B. Du Bois:

Blackness: "The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself

through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneSelf through the eyes of others, measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." (Bois, 2014)

William Augustus Jones:

The result of white oppression and violence…. Blackness is a cultural expression arising from the struggle for liberation and the affirmation that The Black man has been culturally and historically deprived. Of Black Dignity (Jones, 1997)

- The ghetto is a by-product of the institutionalized racism and segregation of America. (Jones, 1997)

Cornel West:

To be Black in America is to be in a constant state of alertness, for your body is always potentially on the line, as #Blackness signifies a condition of ontological and existential insecurity, a mode of being constantly on the edge of nothingness and obsessed with a quest for meaning…. a social and political identity that is defined by the struggle for liberation and equality (West, Race Matters, 1994)

- Oppression is the systemic and pervasive set of practices that reproduce and reinforce hierarchical power relations between

groups." (West, Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism, 2005)

● The ghetto is a prison created by U.S. imperialism and racism that terrorizes and traumatizes its inhabitants, while it also fortifies the privileges of the rulers." (West, Democracy Matters, p. 19)

Frantz Fanon:

● Oppression: To speak of colonialism is to talk about a situation where the human being is diminished and the native is declared inferior and irrelevant.

● Blackness/Ghetto: The Negro is a toy in the white man's hands. They have set him apart, silently waiting for the day when he will die, either by the sword or internal bleeding. It is an excellent day for the white man when he can maintain his superiority without resorting to violence, for violence must be reserved for the Negroes, and is needed only when the Negroes haven't learned their place. (Fanon, 1967).

● Ghetto: The ghetto, the barrio, and the reservation are the world's colonies. They are where the disinherited, the dispossessed, the bums, and the damned are put to rot, to be forgotten by the civilized world. But these places are also the seeds of revolution. (Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth)

Malcolm X:

The common goal of 22 million Afro-Americans is respect: as human beings, the God-given right to be human. Our common goal is to obtain the human rights that America has been denying us. We can never get civil rights in America until our human rights are restored. We will never be recognized as citizens there until we are first recognized as humans. (Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet," April 3, 1964).

Ta-Nehisi Coates:

The truth is that I feel no connection to Africa. None. I can name no relatives on the African continent. I have no direct knowledge of Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, or any other country. In America, it is traditional to destroy the black body - it is heritage. (Ta-Nehisi Coates, Between the World and Me, 2015).

● I knew that my portion of the American galaxy, where a tenacious gravity enslaved bodies, was black and that the other, liberated portion was not (Ta-Nehisi Coates, Between the World and Me, 2015).

● Race is the child of racism, not the father. And naming “the people” has never been a matter of genealogy and physiognomy so much as one of hierarchy. The difference in hue and hair is old. But the belief in the preeminence of coloring and hair, the notion that

these factors can correctly organize society and that they signify more profound attributes, which are indelible—this is the new idea at the heart of these new people who have been brought up hopelessly, tragically, deceitfully, to believe that they are white. (Ta-Nehisi Coates, Between the World and Me, 2015)

Katie Cannon:

Blackness is a theological category because it is a way of naming the experience of being a person of African descent in the United States. A history of slavery, segregation, and racism marks this experience. It is also an experience of resilience, creativity, and faith. Black theology is the attempt to understand this experience considering the Christian faith. Blackness signifies the ontological struggle and liberation hope of a people who have been repeatedly terrorized, stigmatized, and dehumanized in a culture that stereotypes them as unintelligent, inferior, and primitive. (Black Womanist Ethics)

- The intersection of race, gender, and class oppression can be likened to a three-pronged fork with which a pig is held for roasting (Katie Cannon, "The Emergence of Black Feminist Consciousness," 1988).

● Oppression results from the dehumanizing system that deprives people of their full personhood and requires them to accept and live with unjust conditions. (The Womanist Reader)

Kelly Brown Douglas:

● Being black is not simply a matter of skin color or even the sum of one's cultural or ethnic traditions. It is a theological category… Blackness is that social and political identity and experience that is informed and shaped by the experience of oppression (Stand Your Ground & Sexuality and the Black Church).

● The white problem with race is that it allows the category of whiteness to be linked to a false notion of purity that ultimately denies the truth of our humanity and, thus, our natural freedom. (Kelly Brown Douglas, Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God, 2015)

● The systemic use of power to marginalize, exploit, and dominate individuals or groups. (Douglas, Sexuality and the Black Church, p. 24).

● Ghettoization is an act of social exclusion driven by systemic economic and racial oppression. (Kelly Brown Douglas, Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God, 2015).

Robin Eller:

● Blackness is an identity constructed from the oppressive practices of racism, white supremacy, and the intersection of sexism and heteronormativity, the sociohistorical condition of people of African descent who have been systematically oppressed, marginalized, and dehumanized in the United States and other parts of the world. (Robin Eller, "Reimagining Blackness: Towards a New Aesthetic of Liberation," 2018).

● In her book, "Ghetto: The Invention of a Place, the History of an Idea," Eller traces the history and evolution of the ghetto, which she defines as "an imposed, segregated, and enclosed place for a particular group of people, often created as a result of social, economic, and political factors" (Eller, 2019, p. 8).

● The intersection of race, gender, and class oppression is a reality for all black people, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status (Robin Eller, "Reimagining Blackness: Towards a New Aesthetic of Liberation," 2018)

Willie James Jennings:

● Blackness is not simply a racial category but a way of being in the world shaped by the experience of resistance and survival in the face of oppression. He writes, "Blackness is not only about color; it is also about a way of living and being in the world that has

developed in the crucible of resistance and the struggle for survival." (Jennings, 2010, p. 66).

- Oppression: Jennings defines oppression as "the systematic dehumanization and social death of certain groups of people, marked by exploitation, violence, and the denial of basic human rights." (Jennings, 2010, p. 68).

bell hooks:

- Blackness is an identity constantly being constituted about representation and a field of political struggle... Blackness is not a fixed or static identity but rather a contested and dynamic terrain of struggle. (Black Looks: Race and Representation)

- By definition, the ghetto is a place where those who are poor and of color are segregated from the larger society. It is a site of exploitation where profits are made from the labor of low-income people. (Ain't I a Woman)

Resmaa Menakem:

- Blackness is a set of historical, cultural, and somatic experiences unique to people of African descent who have experienced the oppression of racism in North America" (Menakem, 2017, p. 29).

● Oppression is both a set of external conditions (such as poverty and lack of access to resources) and an embodied experience that occurs when we are cut off from our most profound truths and forced to live in ways that don't fit who we genuinely are. Oppression is not just a set of interpersonal relationships. It is a material force written into all people's bodies (My Grandmother's Hands, p. 81)

● The ghetto is any place where people have been cut off from their power and potential, where they are forced to live in a way that is not aligned with their most profound truths" (Menakem, 2017, p. 178).

Althaus-Reid:

● Blackness is not simply about skin color, but social and cultural markers of difference constructed and reinforced within religious institutions. (Indecent Theology)

● Oppression is not simply about physical violence or economic exploitation but about how power is exercised through culture, language, and social norms. (The Queer God)

● The ghetto is not just a site of suffering but also a place of creativity and resistance. It is where people struggle to survive and find new ways of being and knowing in the face of oppression. (From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology)

Gustavo Gutiérrez:

● Blackness: The poor person is the black person, the Indian, the mestizo, the slum-dweller, the person who has no possibilities, the one who is exploited, the one who has no education. People with low incomes are all those people who are pressed down by society and have no way of escape. (Gustavo Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation, p. 105)

● Oppression: Oppression is an act of violence committed by the powerful against the weak, the defenseless, who cannot defend their rights. Oppression is the denial of the right to be fully human. (Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation, p. 83)

● Ghetto: The ghetto is a symbol of all those places in which the poor are forced to live, places that are deprived of resources, hope, and light. The ghetto is a place of desperation, of darkness, of despair. (Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation, p. 106)

TWO

The Black Church and Colonialism!

Now, a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph. [9] He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. [10] Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." [11] Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. [12] But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. [13] The Egyptians subjected the Israelites to hard servitude [14] and made their lives bitter with hard servitude in mortar and bricks and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in allthe tasks that they imposed on them." (Exodus 1: 8-14 NRSV).

"There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong. So, whoever disbelieves in *Taghut* [focus of worship other than God] and believesin Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handhold with no break in it. And Allah is Hearing andKnowing." (Surah

Al Baqarah 2: 256)

Brief History of The Black Church

- The Black Church has its roots in the institution of slavery in the United States. Duringthe 17th and 18th centuries, enslaved Africans were forced to adopt the religion of their masters, but they also developed their own spiritual practices that blended African traditions with Christianity.
- The first independent Black Church in the United States was the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), which was founded in 1816 in Philadelphia by Richard Allen and Absalom Jones. The AME Church was a response to the racism and discriminationthat black people faced in white-controlled churches.
- Other denominations, including the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AME Zion) and the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME), were also founded by black leaders in the early 19th century.
- The Black Church played a significant role in the abolitionist movement, with many black pastors and congregations advocating for the end of slavery and participating inthe Underground Railroad.
- After the Civil War, the Black Church became a center of

social and political activity for black communities. Black churches provided education, healthcare, and other services for their members, and many pastors became leaders in the fight for civil rights.

- In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Black Church underwent a period of institutionalization and denominationalizing. Black churches became more structured and hierarchical, and many denominations were founded to better organize and represent black churches.
- The Great Migration of the early 20th century saw millions of black people leaving the South for Northern and Western cities. The Black Church played a vital role in providing support and community for these migrants, and many new black churches were founded in urban areas.
- The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s was led in large part by black pastors and churches. The Black Church provided a space for organizing and mobilizing, and many pastors, including Martin Luther King Jr., became national figures in the fight for civil rights.

- In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the Black Church has faced challenges from declining membership, changing demographics, and shifts in social attitudes.

Some black churches have also been criticized for being too focused on prosperity theology and personal success rather than social justice.

- Despite these challenges, the Black Church remains a vital institution in black communities in the United States. It continues to provide spiritual nourishment, socialsupport, and a space for organizing and resistance against oppression. The Black Church also continues to evolve and adapt, incorporating new traditions and practices while remaining grounded in its rich history and traditions.

The Origins of the Black Church in the Western Hemisphere

The Emergence of African American Christianity

- 16th century: the forced migration of Africans to the Americas.
- Forced conversion of enslaved Africans to Christianity.
- Suppression of indigenous spiritual practices
- Impact of Slavery on African Spirituality and Religion.
- Enslaved Africans arrived in the Americas, bringing their religious traditions.

The First Black Churches in the Americas

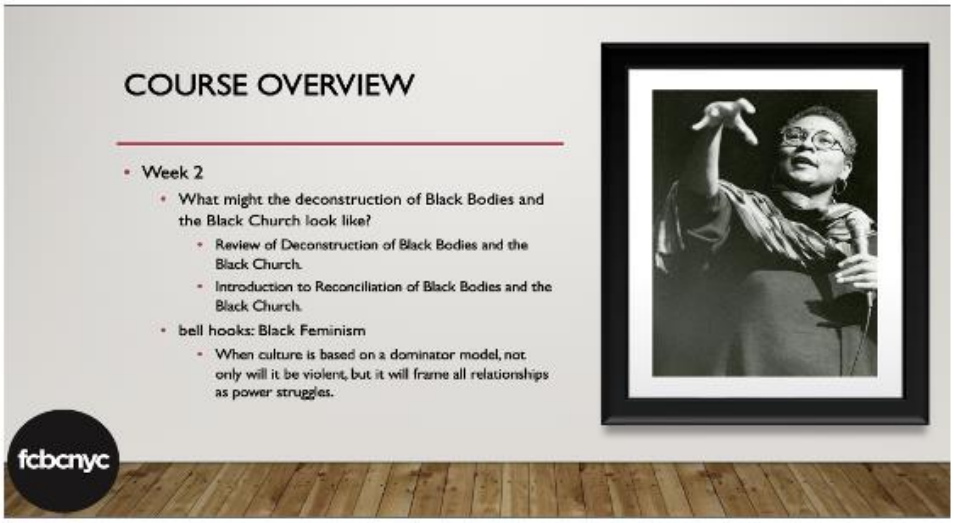
- 17th - 18th centuries: the emergence of African American Christianity.
- The Black Church develops its own unique identity and culture. 19th century.
- The Black Church plays a significant role in the abolitionist movement.

The Black Church in the 20th Century

- 20th Century: The Civil Rights Movement and the Role of the Black Church
- The emergence of the National Baptist Convention and other Black denominations.
- The impact of Jim Crow laws on the.
- Black Church: The Black Church continues to play an essential role in the lives of African Americans, including the Civil Rights Movement.

The Emergence of African American Christianity

- 21st century: The Black Church remains vital to the African American community.


COURSE OVERVIEW
Week 2
What might the deconstruction of Black Bodies and the Black Church look like?
Review of Deconstruction of Black Bodies and the Black Church.
Introduction to Reconciliation of Black Bodies and the Black Church.
bell hooks: Black Feminism
When culture is based on a dominator model, not only will it be violent, but it will frame all relationships as power struggles.
fcbcnyc

Week 2

THREE

Historical Context - The Black Church and Colonialism.

- The imposition of European Christian beliefs and practices on enslaved Africans brought them to the Americas.

- The suppression of African religious and cultural traditions often accompanied the forced conversion of enslaved Africans to Christianity.
- The use of Christianity as a tool of colonialism and oppression, as European powers used Christian missionaries to justify their domination of African and African American communities.
- The suppression of black religious leaders and institutions, including banning black churches in some parts of the United States during slavery and Jim Crow segregation.
- The imposition of European styles of worship and church architecture, often at the expense of African American cultural traditions.
- The marginalization of black theology and the privileging of Eurocentric theological perspectives.
- The perpetuation of white supremacy and racial inequality through the white-controlled structures of the church, including denominational hierarchy and funding.
- The use of Christianity to justify slavery and segregation, as many white Christians argued that black people were inferior and destined for servitude.
- The suppression of black agency and autonomy within the church, with black congregations often subject to the authority of white pastors and leaders.

- The denial of full participation and leadership roles for women and LGBTQ+ individuals within the black church. The privileging of Western theological perspectives marginalizes African and African American theological traditions.
- The perpetuation of patriarchal structures and gender roles within the church, with men often occupying positions of power and influence.
- The exploitation of black labor within the church, with many black clergy and leaders underpaid and overworked.
- The use of Christianity as a tool of respectability politics, with some black leaders emphasizing the need to conform to white middle-class norms to gain acceptance and upward mobility.
- The perpetuation of class divisions within the black community, with middle-class and affluent black churchgoers often distancing themselves from working-class and poor black people. The use of Christianity to justify imperialism and colonialism in Africa and other parts of the world, with some black churches supporting colonial efforts and missionaries preaching a message of white supremacy.
- The suppression of African American cultural expressions within the church, with black music, art, and literature often

marginalized or dismissed as less worthy than European forms.

- . The perpetuation of internalized racism within the black community, with some black Christians adopting the values and attitudes of their white oppressors.
- The perpetuation of a narrow and exclusionary vision of Christianity, with some black churches prioritizing doctrinal purity over social justice and inclusivity.
- The resistance of black people and black churches to colonialism and white supremacy, with many black religious leaders and institutions working tirelessly for the liberation and empowerment of black communities.

How has the Black Church resisted colonialism?

- **Spirituals:** One of the most well-known examples of resistance in the Black Church during the Jim Crow era was through spirituals. Spirituals were religious songs that were often used to express the pain and suffering of slavery and Jim Crow. They were also used to communicate hidden messages of escape or rebellion. For example, the song "Wade in the Water" was a coded message for enslaved people to escape through the waterways, as it advised them to "wade in the water, God's going to trouble the water.

- **Education:** Education was a key component of resistance in the Black Church during the Jim Crow era. Black churches often provided education to African Americans denied access to public schools. In some cases, churches even established their schools. For example, the Bethel Baptist Institutional Church in Jacksonville, Florida, established a school in 1867 that eventually became Edward Waters College, a historically black college.
- **Community Building:** The Black Church also resisted colonialism through community building. Churches allowed African Americans to unite, share their experiences, and organize for change. This was particularly important during the Jim Crow era when segregation and discrimination were pervasive. For example, the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, was a hub for the Civil Rights Movement and served as a meeting place for activists, including Martin Luther King Jr.
- **Activism:** The Black Church also played a crucial role in activism during the Jim Crow era. Many churches organized protests, boycotts, and other resistance against segregation and discrimination. For example, the Friendship Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, played a crucial role in the Atlanta Student Movement, a series of protests and sit-ins against segregation in the early 1960s.

These methods helped to create a sense of resistance and resilience in the face of oppression. They laid the foundation for the Civil Rights Movement and other social justice movements.

The Role of The Black Church in The Decolonization Movement.

- **Haitian Revolution:** During the Haitian Revolution, the Black Church played a crucial role in the fight for independence. Leaders like Toussaint L'Ouverture were inspired by their faith and used it to mobilize their communities toward revolution. (Boukman: Muslim Cleric & Houngan; The rebels used religious symbols and rituals to inspire their troops and rally the general population's support.)
- It was the first successful slave revolt in history, leading to the establishment of the first black republic in the world.
- Black Haitian Christianity traces back to the western coasts of Africa, where the Portuguese introduced Catholicism even before Christopher Columbus landed in the Americas. In particular, the local population in the Kongo embraced Christianity following the voluntary conversion of the Kingdom's royalty and nobility. Over time, the *Kongolese* incorporated Christianity into their culture and adapted it to

their needs. From the sixteenth century, Catholic clergy permitted syncretic practices in *Kongolese* Christianity.

- **Underground Railroad**: During the period of slavery in the United States, the Black Church played a crucial role in the Underground Railroad, a network of secret routes and safe houses that helped slaves escape to freedom. The Black Church provided spiritual guidance and support to slaves, and many Black pastors risked their own lives to help slavesescape. (Source: PBS)

- **Civil Rights Movement:** The Black Church was also a significant force in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Black pastors such as Martin Luther King Jr. led nonviolent protests and marches, and Black churches served as meeting places and organizing centers for the movement. (source: History)

- **Liberation Theology:** In the 1960s and 1970s, Black theologians developed a form of liberation theology that emphasized the importance of social justice and the role of the Black Church in the liberation struggle. Liberation theologians such as James Cone and Cornel West argued that Christianity must be understood in the context of Black

liberation and the fight against white supremacy. (source: The Atlantic)

- **Black Panther Party:** The Black Panther Party, a revolutionary socialist organization active in the 1960s and 1970s, had close ties to the Black Church. Many party members were also members of Black churches, and the party worked closely with Black pastors to address issues such as police brutality and poverty. For your reference, the Black Panther Party was started by queer women. (source: The Nation)
- **Anti-Apartheid Movement:** The Black Church played a significant role in the international movement to end apartheid in South Africa. Black pastors such as Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak were crucial figures in the campaign, and the Black Church provided moral and financial support to the struggle. (source: Africa Renewal)

- **Black Lives Matter:** The Black Church has recently been involved in the Black Lives Matter movement, which seeks to end police brutality and systemic racism. Many Black pastors have spoken out to support the training and provided sanctuary and resources to activists. (source: Sojourners)

- **Immigration Reform:** The Black Church has also been involved in the struggle for immigration reform, recognizing how colonialism and white supremacy have impacted immigrant communities. Black pastors have worked with immigrant rights organizations and have spoken out against anti-immigrant policies. (source: The New York Times)

- **Environmental Justice:** The Black Church has also been involved in the struggle for ecological justice, recognizing how environmental degradation and pollution disproportionately impact Black communities. Black pastors have worked with environmental organizations and have spoken out against environmental racism. (source: The Guardian)

- **Reparations:** Some Black churches have been involved in the movement for reparations, which seeks to address the legacy of slavery and racism through financial compensation. Black pastors have spoken out in support of reparations and have advocated for policies that would provide reparations to Black communities. (source: The Washington Post)

- **Community Development:** Finally, the Black Church has been involved in community development efforts, recognizing the importance of building economic and social power in Black communities. Black pastors have founded community development corporations and have worked to create jobs and economic opportunities for Black people. (source: The Christian Century)

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What Are the Legacies of Colonialism in The Black Church?

The reasons why even today we need to decolonize.

- Hate
- Fear
- Deception
- Cultural alienation
- Control of wealth
- Not following in the footsteps of Jesus.

FOUR

Understanding the Decolonization of the BlackChurch

The Mother's/Father's kingdom is within you, and it is outside you. When you know yourselves,then you will be known, and you will understand that you are children of the living Father/Mother."(Gospel of Thomas 1:2-3). "I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their word,that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so thatthe world may believe that you have sent me.

The glory that you have given me I have given them,so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completelyone, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am,to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

"Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you, and these know that youhave sent me. I made your name

known to them, and I will make it known so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them." (John 17:20-26 NRSV)

What is Decolonization?

- Decolonization is the process of liberation from (the undoing of) oppressive structures of colonialism including political, economic, social, cultural, religious, and psychological liberation from aspects of the colonial experience.
- It can be gradual or sudden, peaceful, or violent… initiated by the colonizer or by the colonized. In some cases, decolonization is a negotiated process, in others it is a result of war or revolution.
- Decolonization is not simply a matter of gaining political independence; it is also aboutdismantling the systems of power that have been used to oppress people of color.
- One of the key aspects of decolonization is the recovery of indigenous knowledge andtraditions.
- Decolonization also requires the dismantling of the Eurocentric worldview that has beenused to justify colonialism.

- It is a process of healing and transformation, and it is essential for the creation of a morejust and equitable world.
- Decolonization requires a willingness to confront the past, address colonialism's legacies, and build a more just and equitable world.

What Are the Principles and Practices of Decolonization?

- **We Must Recognize the History of Colonialism**: Colonialism has had a profound impacton indigenous Bodies & the world, and its effects are still being felt today.
- **We Must Challenge Eurocentric worldviews and theologies**: the assumption that European culture is superior to other cultures; By challenging Eurocentrism, we can beginto dismantle the systems of power that have been used to oppress people of color.
- **We Must Challenge Eurocentric worldviews and theologies**: the assumption that European culture is superior to other cultures; By challenging Eurocentrism, we can beginto dismantle the systems of power that have been used to oppress people of color.

- **We Must Center Indigenous Voices**: recognizing the value and importance of indigenous knowledge and spirituality; centering the voices and perspectives of indigenous Bodies in theological conversations and resisting the tendency to prioritize Western theological frameworks. As Kaitlin Curtice writes in her book "Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God," "We must listen to the stories and wisdom of Indigenous peoples... Itis in their voices and experiences that we find a way forward for faith that is grounded in love, justice, and respect for all creation" (Curtice, 2019, p. 30).
- **We Must Challenge Colonial Narratives**: i.e., dominant narratives that have been constructed by colonial powers. This includes examining the ways in which Christianity has been used to justify colonization and oppression, and working to reframe theological concepts in ways that prioritize justice and liberation.
- **As Willie Jennings writes in his book "The Christian Imagination:** Theology and the Origins of Race," "The task of Christian theology is to critically engage the cultural habits,habits that often serve the interests of the powerful... We must seek to expose and dismantlethose habits" (Jennings, 2010, p. 16).

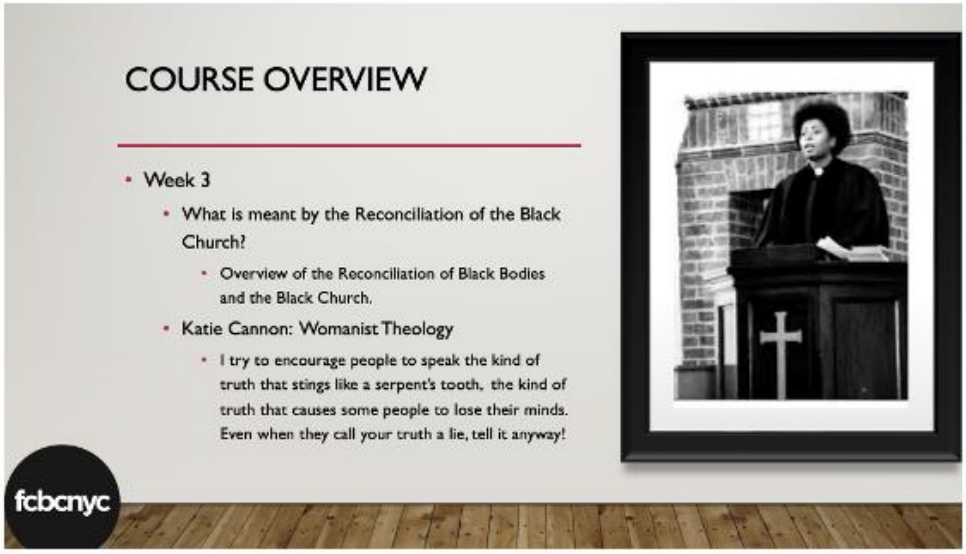
- **We Must Interrogate Power Dynamics**: critique structures of power within the Church and advocate for the inclusion of those who have been historically excluded. As M. ShawnCopeland writes in her book "Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being," "The decolonization of Christian theology will... require a confrontation with power and privilege, a commitment to breaking down those structures that silence the voice of the Other" (Copeland, 2010, p. 36).
- Embracing Interfaith Dialogue: decolonization and inclusivity towards other faith beliefs is one of the outcomes of embracing interfaith dialogue (Mendez, Hogan, & Culhane, 2014).

- **Systemic Racism:** Colonization also led to the establishment of systemic racism in the Americas and the Caribbean. European colonial powers set up systems of government andlaw that were designed to benefit white colonizers at the expense of black communities. This included discriminatory policies such as Jim Crow laws in the United States and

- **Land Dispossession**: Colonization also involved the dispossession of land from indigenous peoples, which often led to violent conflict and displacement. In the Americasand the Caribbean, indigenous peoples were forced off their land and replaced by Europeansettlers, who brought with them African slaves. This process of land dispossession had a profound impact on black communities, who were often relegated to the most marginal andimpoverished areas. The effects of this displacement can still be seen today in the form ofurban segregation and the concentration of poverty in certain neighborhoods (Davis, 1998).

- **Forced Labor**: Finally, colonization also involved the use of forced labor, which had a profound impact on Decolonization involves recognizing the value and importance of interfaith dialogue and collaboration. This means being willing to learn from other religious traditions and to recognize the ways in which Christianity has been used to oppress and marginalize other faith communities. As Kwok Pui-Lan writes in her book "Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology," "Interfaith dialogue is an essential component of decolonization... Interfaith dialogue is a

way of affirming the diversity of the world and of learning from others, as well as a way of challenging the hegemony of Western thought" (Kwok, 2005, p. 66).


COURSE OVERVIEW
Week 3
What is meant by the Reconciliation of the Black Church?
Overview of the Reconciliation of Black Bodies and the Black Church.
Katie Cannon: Womanist Theology
I try to encourage people to speak the kind of truth that stings like a serpent's tooth, the kind of truth that causes some people to lose their minds. Even when they call your truth a lie, tell it anyway!
fcbcnyc

Week 3

FIVE

What Does It Mean to Decolonize the Black Church?

- **Decolonizing Theology**: One of the first steps to decolonizing the Black Church is to challenge the Eurocentric interpretations of the Bible and reclaim our own theological traditions and practices. As theologian James H. Cone argues, "Black theology seeks to demonstrate the validity of Black life in the face of white oppression. It is a theology which seeks to free Christianity from the dominating power of white supremacists" (Cone, 1990,
  p. 17). By centering the experiences and perspectives of Black people, we can develop a theology that speaks

directly to our context and struggles.

- The Black Church must be willing to break the hold of Western Christian imagination thatassumes the West is the sole progenitor and origin of the faith. (Jennings, The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race, 2010)

    - In her article "Decolonizing the Black Church," theologian Dr. Ebony Marshall Turman writes, "Decolonizing the Black Church involves unearthing the ways in which white supremacy has seeped into our ecclesial systems and practices and challenging them." (Turman, 2019)
    - Decolonizing the Black Church is about restoring our faith and theological practices to a space that is communal, interdependent, and life-giving. (Bantum, 2018)

- **Embracing Liberation Theology**: Another way to decolonize the Black Church is to embrace the principles of liberation theology, which emerged in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s. As theologian James Perkinson notes, "Liberation theology seeks to

readthe biblical story from the bottom up, beginning with the perspective of the oppressed" (Perkinson, 2015, p. 9). By prioritizing the needs and perspectives of the marginalized, wecan develop a theology that is grounded in the struggle for justice and liberation.

- **Dismantling Patriarchy:** Patriarchy is a form of oppression that is often perpetuated within the Black Church, particularly in its treatment of women and LGBTQ+ individuals.To decolonize the Black Church, we must challenge and dismantle patriarchal structures and attitudes. As theologian Kelly Brown Douglas argues, "The black church must cease promoting and accepting the dominant culture's gender norms that maintain a patriarchal order" (Douglas, 2018, p. 154). By centering the experiences and voices of women and LGBTQ+ individuals, we can create a more inclusive and equitable community.

Engaging in Anti-Racism Work: Racism is a pervasive problem that affects all aspects of society, including the Black Church. To decolonize the Black Church, we must engage in anti-racism work and

actively work to dismantle the systems of oppression that perpetuate racism. As theologian, Willie James Jennings notes, "The gospel of Jesus Christcalls us to work to dismantle systems of radicalized violence and injustice and to repair the damage done by those systems" (Jennings, 2015, p. 38). By entering the struggle againstracism, we can create a community that is committed to justice and liberation for all.

- **Emphasizing Communal Solidarity**: Finally, to decolonize the Black Church, we must reject the individualistic and consumerist aspects of contemporary Christianity and returnto a communal understanding of faith that prioritizes justice and liberation for all. As theologian Emilie M. Townes argues, "The Christian tradition can and should provide a sense of communal solidarity that encourages individuals and communities to act on behalfof the common good" (Townes, 2005, p. 75). By centering on the needs and perspectives of the community, we can create a Black Church that is truly committed to the struggle for justice and liberation.

Why is decolonization important for the Black Church?

1. *The link between colonization and the oppression of Black Bodies.*

- **Slavery**: One of the most direct links between colonization and the oppression of black bodies is the transatlantic slave trade. This practice was enabled by European colonial powers, who captured and transported millions of Africans to the Americas and the Caribbean to work as slaves. According to historian Eric Williams, the slave trade was a central component of the colonial economy, with profits from slave labor helping to buildthe foundations of modern capitalism (Williams, 1944). The legacy of slavery continues to impact black communities in the Americas and the Caribbean, with systemic racism and inequality still prevalent.

- **Cultural Erasure**: Another link between colonization and the oppression of black bodies is the erasure of African cultural traditions. During the colonial period, European powers actively sought to suppress African

spiritual practices, languages, and customs, viewing them as barbaric and uncivilized. This erasure has had a lasting impact on black communities, who continue to struggle with the loss of their cultural heritage (Rodney, 1981). This has also contributed to a sense of cultural inferiority and a lack of self-esteem, which has been linked to mental health issues and other negatives in the Black communities in the Americas and the Caribbean. During the colonial period, European powers established plantations and mines that relied on the labor of African slaves. This practice was characterized by extreme exploitation and abuse, with slaves working long hours in dangerous conditions for little or no pay. The legacy of forced labor can still be seen todayin the form of modern-day slavery, which continues to be a major problem in many parts of the world, including the Americas and the Caribbean (Bales & Soodalter, 2009).

1. What Does It Mean to Decolonize the Black Church?

- To decolonize the Black Church in the Americas and Caribbean means to challenge the Eurocentric interpretations of Christianity that have been imposed upon the Black community and reclaim our own spiritual traditions and practices. This requires

acknowledging the ways in which colonization has influenced our understanding of faith and spirituality and working to dismantle these systems of oppression. (Kornegay, 2021)

- Decolonizing the Black Church also means confronting the ways in which we have internalized the messages of white supremacy and oppression. This requires examining ourown biases and prejudices and working to create a more inclusive and equitable communitythat stands in solidarity with other marginalized groups. (Pinn, 2018)

- At the heart of decolonizing the Black Church is a commitment to love and justice. This means embracing the teachings of Jesus and his message of agape love and living out thatmessage in our daily lives. It also means recognizing the ways in which the Black Church has been complicit in the oppression of marginalized groups and working to create a worldthat is free from all forms of violence and exploitation. (Kornegay, 2021)

Decolonizing the Black Church in the Americas and Caribbean requires a critical engagement with history, particularly the history of slavery and colonialism, and its impacton the Black community. This means centering the voices and experiences of

Black people in our theology and praxis and working to undo the legacies of colonialism that continueto shape our world today. (Pinn, 2018)

Decolonizing the Black Church also means recognizing the diversity within our communityand working to create spaces that are inclusive of all Black and marginalized bodies. This requires challenging heteronormativity and sexism within the Black Church and working to create a more welcoming and affirming community for LGBTQ+ individuals and women. (Kornegay, 2021)

2. **What are some strategies for decolonizing the Black Church?**

- **Centering Indigenous Spiritual Practices**: One strategy for decolonizing the Black Church is to center indigenous spiritual practices. Many African cultures have their own traditional spiritual practices that were suppressed during colonization. By reclaiming these practices and integrating them into worship, the Black Church can resist the legacy of colonization and celebrate its own cultural heritage. As theologian James Cone argues, "African American Christians must reconnect with their African heritage and spiritual roots in order to truly liberate themselves from the colonial mindset imposed upon them by white supremacy" (Cone, 1997).

- **Embracing Liberation Theology**: Another strategy for decolonizing the Black Church is to embrace liberation theology. Liberation theology emphasizes the relationship between faith and social justice and seeks to empower marginalized communities. By prioritizing justice and liberation for all people, the Black Church can resist the individualism and consumerism of

contemporary Christianity and return to a more communal understanding of faith. As theologian Delores Williams writes, "Liberation theology is a critical perspective on religious practice and theological discourse that seeks to raise up the voice of the oppressed and give them a means of articulating their own experience" (Williams, 1993).

Prioritizing Intersectionality: A third strategy for decolonizing the Black Church is to prioritize intersectionality. Intersectionality recognizes that systems of oppression are interconnected, and people experience oppression in different ways based on their multiple identities. By acknowledging the unique experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals, women, and other marginalized groups within the Black community, the Black Church canbecome more inclusive and equitable. As theologian Kelly Brown Douglas argues, "We cannot address racism without addressing sexism, without addressing homophobia, without addressing transphobia. They are all part of the same system of oppression" (Douglas, 2020).

- **Confronting Anti-Blackness:** Another important strategy for decolonizing the Black Church is to confront anti-Blackness. Anti-Blackness is a system of oppression that devalues Blackness and reinforces white supremacy. By recognizing and confronting the

ways in which the Black Church has internalized anti-Blackness, it can work to dismantlethese systems of oppression within its own community. As theologian Willie James Jennings writes, "The Black Church must confront its own complicity in the oppressive systems that have been imposed upon it, and work to resist these systems in all their forms"(Jennings, 2010).

- **Engaging in Radical Hospitality**: A final strategy for decolonizing the Black Church is to engage in radical hospitality. Radical hospitality is a way of welcoming and embracing all people, regardless of their background or identity. By creating a space where all peoplefeel welcome and valued, the Black Church can work to break down the walls of divisionand separation that have been imposed by colonialism and white supremacy. As theologian

  M. Shawn Copeland writes, "Radical hospitality is a way of embodying the Gospel, of living out the message of love and compassion that Jesus taught" (Copeland, 2016)

SIX

Understanding Reconciliation Within the Black Church.

Clothe ourselves with the perfect Human, acquire it for ourselves as they commanded us, and proclaim the good news." (The Gospel of Mary 10:11).

"But he's already made it plain how to live, what to do, what God is looking for in men and women. It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal inyour love, and don't take yourself too seriously take God seriously." (Micah 6:8 MSG)

"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:36-40NRSV)

Ways to Decolonize the Black Church by Examining Its Practices, Beliefs, and Traditions.

1. Obstacles to decolonization in the Black Church.

- **Resistance to Change**: One of the main obstacles to decolonization in the Black Church is resistance to change. Many Black churches have been influenced by European theology and doctrine for centuries, and there may be resistance to the idea of returning to indigenous spiritual practices or embracing a more communal understanding of faith. This resistance can be fueled by fear of the unknown or a desire to maintain the status quo. (Reid, 2017)
- **Lack of Resources:** Another obstacle to decolonization in the Black Church is a lack of resources. Many Black churches may not have the financial or institutional resources to support decolonization efforts. This can make it difficult to create the infrastructure neededto reclaim indigenous spiritual practices or to provide education and training to congregants. (Horne, 2016)
- **Internalized Oppression**: The Black Church has also been impacted by internalized oppression. This refers to the ways in which members of marginalized groups can internalize the messages of oppression and begin to see themselves and their communitiesas inferior. Internalized

oppression can make it difficult for Black churches to embrace a more inclusive and equitable understanding of faith and to challenge systems of oppression. (Rahim, 2019)

- **Lack of Inclusivity**: Many Black churches may struggle with issues of inclusivity,particularly when it comes to LGBTQ+ individuals or women. This can make it difficult to fully embrace a communal understanding of faith or to work in solidarity with other marginalized groups. (Fields, 2018)
- **External Pressure:** The Black Church may face external pressure from dominant cultures to maintain the status quo. This can take the form of opposition to decolonization efforts or attempts to co-opt Black spirituality and cultural practices. (Sapp, 2019)

2. Strategies for overcoming challenges and seizing opportunities.
    - **Education and Empowerment:** One strategy for overcoming challenges and seizing opportunities in the decolonization of the Black Church is to prioritize education and

empowerment. This means equipping Black church leaders and members with the knowledge and tools necessary to challenge and dismantle systems of oppression. According to Dr. Jacqueline Thompson, a professor of theology and ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary, "Education is critical for decolonizing the Black Church because itallows individuals to gain a deeper understanding of their history and the impact of colonization on their faith and spirituality."

- **Centering the Margins:** Another strategy is to center the margins in the Black Church's mission and ministry. This means prioritizing the needs and perspectives of marginalized groups such as LGBTQ+ individuals, women, and people with disabilities. As Rev. Dr. Yolanda Pierce, dean of the Howard University School of Divinity, writes, "We must be willing to center the margins in our theological reflections and ministry practices, challenging the ways in which our communities have been complicit in their oppression."
- **Community Building:** A third strategy is to prioritize community building and solidarityamong Black church communities. This means creating spaces for dialogue and collaboration among churches and communities across the African diaspora. According to Rev. Dr.

Neichelle Guidry, Dean of the Chapel at Spelman College, "Community building is essential for decolonizing the Black Church because it allows us to connect with one another, share resources, and build a collective vision for the future."

- **Reclaiming Spiritual Practices**: Another strategy is to reclaim and celebrate indigenous spiritual practices within the Black Church. This means recognizing and honoring the diverse spiritual traditions that have been suppressed and erased by colonization. As Dr. Thompson writes, "Reclaiming indigenous spiritual practices can help us to decolonize ourfaith and connect with the rich spiritual traditions that have sustained our communities forgenerations."
- **Activism and Advocacy**: Finally, a key strategy for decolonizing the Black Church is to engage in activism and advocacy for social justice. This means using the power and influence of the Black Church to advocate for policies and practices that promote equity and justice for all people. As Rev. Dr. Pierce writes,

  "The Black Church has always been

a voice for justice and liberation. We must continue to use our platform to speak truth topower and advocate for the most vulnerable among us".

Applying Decolonization to The Black Church.

Provide ideas for action-oriented steps towards decolonization.

- **Reclaiming Indigenous Spiritual Practices:** To decolonize the Black Church, it isimportant to reclaim the spiritual practices that were suppressed by colonization. This can be done by incorporating elements of African and Indigenous spiritual traditions into worship services and rituals. Reviving ancestral practices and incorporating traditional music, dance, and storytelling can help to reconnect the Black Church to its roots and createa more culturally rich and diverse community. (The African American Lectionary, 2010)
- **Embracing Intersectionality:** The Black Church must recognize the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and other identities in the struggle for liberation. This means creating space for LGBTQ+ individuals and working to dismantle the patriarchal structures that have excluded women from leadership roles. It also means recognizing the unique experiences and struggles of Afro-Latinx, Afro-Caribbean, and other Black diaspora

communities. Embracing intersectionality can create a more inclusive and equitable community that prioritizes the needs of all members. (The Presbyterian Church, USA, 2016)

- **Centering Justice and Liberation:** The Black Church must center justice and liberation in its mission and practices. This means actively working to dismantle systems of oppression and advocating for social and political change. The Black Church can use its platform to address issues such as police brutality, mass incarceration, and economic inequality, and work to create policies and programs that promote justice and equality. (The National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.,2017)

Promoting Education and Awareness: To decolonize the Black Church, it is important to promote education and awareness about the impact of colonization and the role of the Black Church in social justice movements. This can be done by organizing workshops, seminars, and community events that address issues of race, colonization, and social justice. By creating space for dialogue and learning, the Black Church can empower its members to become advocates for change and allies in the struggle for liberation. (The United Church of

Christ, 2018)

- **Supporting Community-led Initiatives:** The Black Church can also support community-led initiatives that promote justice and liberation. This can include supporting localgrassroots organizations.
- **Supporting Community-led Initiatives:** The Black Church can also support community-led initiatives that promote justice and liberation. This can include supporting local grassroots organizations and movements, providing resources, and funding, and working in partnership with other community organizations. By supporting community-led initiatives, the Black Church can create a more collaborative and impactful approach to social justicework. (The National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., 2017)

What Are Some Strategies for Decolonizing the Black Church and Black Bodies?

- **Education and Reclamation of Indigenous Spiritual Practices**: To decolonize the Black Bodies in the Americas and the Caribbean, there is a need for education and the reclamation of indigenous spiritual practices. This involves learning about the traditional

practices of African and Indigenous cultures and integrating them into contemporary spirituality. It also involves rejecting the imposition of European theology and doctrine and returning to a more communal understanding of faith and spirituality (Kendall, 2016).

- **Acknowledge and Confront Internalized Oppression:** To decolonize Black Bodies in the Americas and the Caribbean, it is essential to acknowledge and confront the ways in which internalized oppression manifests. This involves examining our own biases and prejudices and working to dismantle the systems of oppression that exist within our own communities. It also involves standing in solidarity with other marginalized communities and recognizing that true liberation cannot be achieved in isolation (Stevens, 2018).
- **Embrace Intersectionality**: To decolonize Black Bodies in the Americas and the Caribbean, it is important to embrace intersectionality. This involves recognizing that systems of oppression are interconnected and that no one form of oppression can be eliminated without addressing the others. It also involves creating spaces that are inclusiveof LGBTQ+ individuals, women, and other marginalized groups

(Crenshaw, 1991).

- **Prioritize Justice and Liberation**: To decolonize Black Bodies in the Americas and the Caribbean, it is crucial to prioritize justice and liberation. This involves challenging the individualistic and consumerist aspects of contemporary Christianity and returning to a more communal understanding of faith that prioritizes justice and liberation for all. It also involves standing in solidarity with other marginalized communities and working to createa world that is free from all forms of violence and exploitation (Cone, 1997).
- **Advocacy and Activism:** To decolonize Black Bodies in the Americas and the Caribbean, it is essential to engage in advocacy and activism. This involves using our voices and resources to challenge systems of oppression and create change in our communities. It also involves supporting organizations and initiatives that are working towards justice and liberation for all (Kendall, 2016).
- **Embracing and centering Black indigenous spirituality**: The forced conversion of enslaved Africans to Christianity during colonization resulted in the suppression of their indigenous spiritual practices. To decolonize the Black Body, it is important to reclaim

andcenter these practices. As Resmaa Menakem writes in his book "My Grandmother's Hands," "Our ancestral spirits, our inner world, and the spiritual realm all need to be acknowledged, recognized, and welcomed in the process of healing and becoming whole" (Menakem, 2017, p. 193).

- **Challenging Eurocentric education and history**: The Eurocentric education system that dominates the Americas and the Caribbean perpetuates the myth of white superiority and the erasure of Black contributions to history. To decolonize the Black Body, it is necessary tochallenge and dismantle these systems of education and history. As Menakem writes, "Weneed to claim our history, our achievements, and our dignity" (Menakem, 2017, p. 211).
- **Addressing internalized oppression and trauma**: The trauma of colonization and slaverycontinues to impact the mental and emotional well-being of Black bodies. To decolonize the Black Body, it is essential to address and heal from this trauma. As Menakem writes, "We must acknowledge and address the impact of centuries of trauma on our bodies, our minds, and our spirits" (Menakem, 2017, p. 27).
- **Prioritizing healing and self-care:** The process of

decolonizing the Black Body can be emotionally and mentally taxing. It is important to prioritize self-care and healing throughout this process. As Menakem writes, "Self-care is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and it is an act of political warfare" (Menakem, 2017, p. 67).

- **Engaging in activism and social justice work**: Decolonization is not just an individual process, but a collective one. To decolonize the Black Body, it is necessary to engage in activism and social justice work that addresses the root causes of oppression. As Menakemwrites, "We must not only heal individually but also engage collectively in dismantling the systems that perpetuate oppression." (Menakem, 2017, p. 207).

Challenges and opportunities for decolonizing the Black Church and Black Bodies?

Challenges	opportunities
The legacy of colonization and white supremacy is deeply embedded in the Black Church and Black Bodies, making it difficult to fully decolonize. As Menakem (2017) notes, "the legacy of colonization, slavery, and oppression is lodged deep within the collective psyche of Black people in America, and it manifests in various forms of trauma, including emotional, physical, and spiritual trauma."	The Black Church and Black Bodies have a rich history and tradition that can be harnessed to support decolonization efforts. As Jones (2020) argues, "the Black Church has a unique history of resistance to oppression and a tradition of liberation theology that can be used to support efforts to decolonize Black Bodies."
The Black Church and Black Bodies are not monolithic, and there are often competing interests and ideologies that can make it difficult to achieve consensus on decolonization efforts. As Menakem (2017)notes, "there are often divergent views on what it means to decolonize, and what actions need to be taken to achieve it."	The Black Church and Black Bodies have a rich network of community organizations and activists that can support decolonization efforts. As Harris (2019) argues, "there is a growing movement of Black activists and organizations that are working to decolonize Black Bodies and create a more just and equitable society."
The Black Church and Black Bodies often face resistance from those who benefit from the current system of oppression. As Menakem (2017) notes, "there are often powerful forces that resist efforts to decolonize, including those who benefit from the current system of oppression."	The Black Church and Black Bodies can leverage the power of grassroots organizing and community mobilization to create change. As Jones (2020) argues, "there is a long history of Black communities organizing and mobilizing to create change, and this power can be harnessed to support decolonization efforts."
The Black Church and Black Bodies are often marginalized and excluded from mainstream	The Black Church and Black Bodies can leverage their collective power and influence to

institutions and decision-making processes. AsHarris (2019) notes, "Black communities are often excluded from the political and economic institutions that shape their lives, making it difficult to achieve meaningful change."	demand systemic change. As Menakem (2017) argues, "the power of Black communities lies in their collective ability to demand change, and this power can be harnessed to support decolonization efforts."
The process of decolonization is ongoing and requires sustained effort and commitment. As Menakem (2017) notes, "Decolonization is nota one-time event, but rather an ongoing process that requires a sustained commitment to healing and transformation."	The process of decolonization can be a transformative and liberating experience for the Black Church and Black Bodies. As Harris (2019) argues, "the process of decolonization can be a deeply transformative experience that allows Black communities to reclaim their power and agency, and to create a more just and equitable society."

COURSE OVERVIEW
Week 4
How do we recognize the Reconciliatory Path of the Black Church?
Define Practical Strategies for Decolonization and Reconciliation.
Understand Black Bodies and The Black Church as a Site of Reconciliation.
Resmaa Menakem: Somatic Abolitionism
Change culture and you change lives. You can also change the course of history.
At its best, activism is a form of healing. It is about learning and expressing regard, compassion and love. Healing is a reminder of what we already are and what we have always been part of.
fcbcnyc

Week 4

SEVEN

What is Reconciliation?

Reconciliation is the act of restoring a relationship or bringing about a resolution to a conflict. It involves acknowledging and addressing the harm that has been done and working towards healing and restoration. Reconciliation can occur on a personal level, between individuals or groups, or on a larger societal level, between communities or nations. For

reconciliation to occur, there must be a willingness on both sides to engage in the process. This may involve acknowledging past wrongs, expressing remorse, and making amends for harm done. It may also involve creating space for open and honest dialogue and working towards understanding and empathy for those who have been harmed. Reconciliation is often a long and difficult process, but it is essential for building stronger and more resilient communities. It requires a deep commitment to justice, compassion, and healing, and a willingness to confront the root causes of conflict and division. Ultimately, reconciliation is about building relationships and creating a world that is more just, peaceful, and equitable for all.

Communication: Open and honest communication is essential for reconciliation. Both parties need to be willing to listen to each other and to share their feelings.

Forgiveness: Forgiveness is not always easy, but it is essential for reconciliation. Both parties need to be willing to forgive the other for their mistakes.

Commitment: Reconciliation requires commitment from both parties. Both parties need to be willing to work hard to rebuild the relationship.

Be patient: Reconciliation takes time. Don't expect to be able to fix everything overnight.

Be willing to compromise: Both parties need to be willing to give and take to reach a resolution.

Be respectful: Even if you are angry with each other, it is important to be respectful of each other's feelings.

Reconciliation in the Black Church.

It is a process of healing and restoration that involves acknowledging and addressing the historical and ongoing effects of oppression, discrimination, and racial injustice. It is a process that recognizes the interconnectedness of all members of the Black community and seeks to build bridges of understanding and solidarity.

At its core, reconciliation in the Black Church is about creating a community that embodies the teachings of Jesus and the principles of agape love. It involves recognizing the humanity of all individuals, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or any other social identity. It means working towards a society where all people are valued, respected, and treated with dignity.

- Reconciliation in the Black Church is also about confronting the ways in which the Church has been complicit in the

oppression of marginalized communities. This includes acknowledging the Church's role in the slave trade and the forced conversion of enslaved Africans to Christianity. It also means confronting the Church's history of discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals, women, and other marginalized groups.

- The process of reconciliation in the Black Church involves both individual and collective action. It requires a commitment to listening to and learning from those who have been historically marginalized and oppressed. It means actively working to dismantle systems of oppression and inequality and to create a society that is just and equitable for all.
- Reconciliation in the Black Church is not a one-time event, but an ongoing process of transformation and renewal. It requires a deep commitment to love, justice, and community, and a willingness to engage in difficult conversations and actions. It means recognizing the intergenerational trauma that has been inflicted on the Black community and working to heal those wounds.

Overall, reconciliation in the Black Church is a powerful tool for building a community that embodies the values of justice, equity, and compassion. It is a process that recognizes the

interconnectedness of all individuals and seeks to create a world that is free from all forms of oppression and injustice.

- Reconciliation of the Black Church is a process of healing and restoration within the Black Church community. It is a process of addressing the historical and systemic racism that has been present in the church, and of working to create a more inclusive and welcoming space for all people.

-The Black Church has a long and rich history of social justice activism. It has been a powerful force for change in the fight for civil rights, and it continues to play an important role in the struggle for racial equality. However, the Black Church has also been a place where racism has been perpetuated. For example, many Black churches have been segregated, and they have often been reluctant to address issues of race and racism.

- Reconciliation of the Black Church is a necessary step in the fight for racial justice. It is a way to heal the wounds of the past and create a more just and equitable future.
- There are many ways to achieve reconciliation, but some common methods include:

1. **Education:** One of the most important steps in reconciliation is education. Black churches need to learn

about the history of racism in the church, and they need to be willing to confront their own complicity in perpetuating racism.

2. **Forgiveness**: Forgiveness is another important step in reconciliation. Black churches need to be willing to forgive those who have wronged them, and they need to be willing to let go of the anger and resentment that they have been holding onto.
3. **Commitment**: Reconciliation is a long-term process. It requires commitment from all members of the Black Church community. Black churches need to be willing to work together to create a more just and equitable space for all people.

- Reconciliation of the Black Church is an important goal, but it is not an easy one. It will require a lot of hard work and dedication, but it is worth it. The Black Church has the power to be a force for change in the world, and reconciliation is one way to make that happen.

Parakaleō

Parakaleō - {πăρăκăλέω}

- etymology can be broken down into two parts: "para" and "kaleō." "Para" means "alongside" or "besides," while "kaleō" means "to call" or "to summon." Therefore, "Parakaleō" can be understood as

a compound word meaning "to call alongside" or "to call for assistance".

- It can also mean "to admonish, exhort · to beg, entreat, beseech." In the New Testament, "Parakaleō" is primarily used in the context of comfort, encouragement, exhortation, and consolation. It can also imply urging or pleading. The word is often associated with the work of the Holy Spirit and the ministry of Jesus Christ.

1. Encouragement and Comfort: In 2 Corinthians1:3-4, the apostle Paul writes, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." Here, the word Parakaleō emphasizes the role of God as the ultimate source of comfort, and how believers can then extend that comfort to others.
2. Exhortation: exhorting or urging someone to take a specific action. In Romans 12:1, Paul writes, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." Here, the word Parakaleō is translated as "I appeal to you," urging believers to offer their lives as a living sacrifice.

3. Summoning and Calling for a specific purpose: In Acts 16:9, the apostle Paul has a vision of a man from Macedonia saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." The phrase "help us" is translated from the Greek word Parakaleō, indicating a call for assistance.

"Reconciliation cannot occur
without acknowledging
the harm that has been done."

EIGHT

Principles And Practices of Reconciliation.

The Black Church has a unique role to play in the process of reconciliation, both within its own community and beyond. Reconciliation is a process of restoring relationships that have been broken by division, injustice, and oppression.

The principles and practices of reconciliation in the Black Church are grounded in the teachings of Jesus and a commitment to love, justice, and community.

- Acknowledge the harm that has been done.

Reconciliation cannot occur without acknowledging the harm that has been done. This means acknowledging the ways in which the Black Church has been complicit in the oppression of marginalized communities, as well as the harm that has been done to the Black Church itself through colonization and forced conversion to Christianity.

- Embrace a theology of liberation.

A theology of liberation is central to the principles and practices of reconciliation in the Black Church. This means embracing a view of God as a God of justice and liberation, who stands with the oppressed and works to bring about their freedom. It means rejecting theologies that prioritize personal salvation over communal liberation and justice.

- Center the voices of marginalized communities.

The process of reconciliation must center on the voices of marginalized communities, who have been most impacted by the harm that has been done. This means listening to their experiences, validating their pain and trauma, and working to address the root causes of oppression.

- Repentance and accountability.

Repentance and accountability are key principles of reconciliation. This means taking responsibility for the harm that has been done and working to make amends. It means holding individuals and institutions accountable for their actions and working to create systems and structures that prevent harm from occurring in the future.

- Commitment to justice and liberation.

Finally, the principles and practices of reconciliation in the Black Church are grounded in a commitment to justice and liberation. This means working to dismantle systems of oppression and creating a world that is just and equitable for all. It means standing in solidarity with other marginalized communities and recognizing that true reconciliation cannot occur without justice and liberation.

What do colonizers say reconciliation is versus Black (oppressed/colonized) people?

- **Forgiveness and forgetting:** Colonizers often believe that the best way to move on from the past is to forgive and forget. They may believe that dwelling on the past will only serve to divide people and make it difficult to build a better future.
- **Moving on:** Colonizers may also believe that it is important to move on from the past and focus on the future. They may believe that the best way to do this is to focus on building a better society for everyone, regardless of their race or ethnicity.

➢ Colonizers often view reconciliation as a way to move past the injustices of colonialism without addressing the root causes of oppression.

- For colonizers, reconciliation is often about achieving a sense of closure or closure without necessarily addressing the inequalities and injustices that continue to exist. This approach to reconciliation tends to focus on individual acts of forgiveness rather than systemic change, which ultimately benefits the colonizers rather than the colonized.
- Justice and healing: The colonized often believe that it is important to remember the past to prevent it from happening again. They may believe that justice is necessary for healing and that it is important to hold those who committed atrocities accountable for their actions.
- Respect: The colonized may also believe that it is important for the colonizers to respect their culture and traditions. They may believe that the colonizers should learn about their history and understand the impact that colonization has had on their lives.
- The colonized often view reconciliation as a process of healing and transformation that requires addressing the root causes of oppression.
- For the colonized, reconciliation involves confronting the ongoing impacts of colonialism and working toward meaningful reparations and restitution. This approach to reconciliation acknowledges the systemic nature of oppression and seeks to address the structural inequalities

that continue to exist. In addition, the colonized often view reconciliation as a process that must be led by the communities most affected by colonialism. This approach recognizes that true reconciliation requires the participation and leadership of those who have been directly impacted by colonialism, rather than simply relying on the benevolence of the colonizers.

What does it mean to Reconcile the Black Church?

To reconcile the Black Church means to address and heal the divisions, conflicts, and historical traumas within the African American religious community. It involves acknowledging the deep wounds caused by internalized racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination within the church. Reconciliation requires a process of truth-telling, where the Black Church acknowledges its complicity in perpetuating harm and marginalization. It means examining and repenting for the ways in which the church has been used to uphold systems of oppression and to exclude and discriminate against certain members of the community. Reconciliation also involves seeking justice and restitution for the harm done. This may include efforts to dismantle discriminatory practices, create inclusive spaces for marginalized groups, and provide resources and support for those who have been marginalized within the church.

Furthermore, reconciliation involves fostering a culture of empathy, understanding, and compassion within the Black Church. It requires creating spaces for dialogue, listening, and learning from one another's experiences. It means recognizing the unique struggles and intersectional identities within the African American community and working towards creating a church that affirms and celebrates diversity.

To reconcile the Black Church is also to reclaim and celebrate the richness of African and African diasporic spirituality and traditions. It means embracing the cultural and spiritual practices that have been historically suppressed and integrating them into the fabric of the church. This reclamation can help heal the wounds of colonization and bring a sense of wholeness and authenticity to the Black Church. Ultimately, reconciling the Black Church is a transformative process that seeks to heal the wounds of the past, dismantle systems of oppression, and create a more just and inclusive religious community. It is a journey towards unity, love, and liberation, where all members of the Black community are embraced, valued, and empowered within the church.

Reconciliation to Whom and to What.

A. WHOM:

The Black Church reconciles itself to itself and Others.

- Internally, it seeks to reconcile the various traditions and practices within the African American community, recognizing the diversity of beliefs and experiences among its members. This reconciliation involves embracing and celebrating the rich spiritual heritage of African Americans, including indigenous practices that have been suppressed or stigmatized.
- Externally, the Black Church seeks to reconcile with society at large, particularly regarding the history of racism, discrimination, and oppression that African Americans have endured.

This reconciliation involves addressing the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and ongoing systemic racism, as well as the ways in which these injustices have been perpetuated and even reinforced within religious institutions. The Black Church also seeks to reconcile with other marginalized groups, recognizing the interconnectedness of struggles for liberation and justice. This includes building alliances and solidarity with LGBTQ+ communities, women's rights movements, immigrant rights organizations, and other groups fighting for social and economic justice. The Black Church recognizes that true liberation cannot be achieved without addressing the intersecting forms of oppression that impact multiple marginalized communities. Ultimately, the reconciliation of the Black Church is about seeking healing, justice,

and liberation for all. It is a process of recognizing and confronting the ways in which both the Church and society have fallen short in their treatment of Black and marginalized bodies. It is a commitment to working towards a future where all people are valued, respected, and given the opportunity to thrive.

B. WHAT:

Explain the link between reconciliation and freedom of Black Bodies.

The link between reconciliation and the freedom of Black bodies is deeply rooted in the history of racial oppression and systemic racism. Reconciliation is the process of acknowledging and addressing the harm caused by past injustices and working toward healing and restoration. In the context of the Black community, reconciliation is essential for the freedom and liberation of Black bodies. Black bodies have historically been subjected to various forms of violence, discrimination, and dehumanization. From slavery and Jim Crow segregation to modern-day police brutality and mass incarceration, Black bodies have been systematically oppressed and denied their basic human rights and dignity.

Reconciliation, in this context, involves acknowledging the historical and ongoing systemic oppression faced by Black bodies and working towards dismantling the structures and ideologies that

perpetuate these injustices. It requires an honest examination of the past, including the acknowledgment of the horrors of slavery, colonization, and racial violence. Through reconciliation, we can confront the legacy of racism and its impact on the Black community, creating space for healing and restoration. This involves engaging in difficult and fierce conversations about race, actively listening to the experiences of Black individuals, and challenging our own biases and prejudices. It also means creating policies and institutions that address the systemic inequalities faced by Black bodies, such as access to quality education, healthcare, housing, and employment opportunities.

Reconciliation also necessitates addressing the trauma and intergenerational effects of racism. The impacts of historical injustices and ongoing racial discrimination can have lasting effects on individuals and communities. By recognizing and addressing this trauma, we can create pathways toward healing and empower Black individuals and communities to reclaim their agency and dignity. Ultimately, the goal of reconciliation is to create a society where Black bodies are truly free. Freedom for Black bodies means the elimination of racial profiling, police brutality, and discriminatory practices in all aspects of life.

It means equal access to opportunities and resources, including economic, educational, and political power. It means the recognition

and celebration of Black culture, history, and contributions to society. It means the dismantling of systemic racism and the creation of a just and equitable society for all. Reconciliation and freedom of Black bodies are interconnected in the struggle for racial justice. Reconciliation involves acknowledging past injustices, addressing systemic racism, and working toward healing and restoration. Through this process, we can create a society where Black bodies are free from oppression and discrimination, and where all individuals are treated with dignity and respect.

CONCLUSION

The journey of decolonization and reconciliation within the Black Church is one that calls upon the divine presence of God. Just as the Psalmist pleaded for the return of God's protection and favor upon the vineyard, we too seek the restoration of our spiritual heritage. We recognize the struggles and challenges faced by the Black Church, from the trespassers who have exploited and hindered its growth to the destructive forces that have attempted to diminish its influence. Yet, amid these trials, we hold on to the promise of Isaiah, that the Spirit of the LORD is upon us, anointing us to bring good tidings to the meek, to bind up the broken-hearted, and to proclaim liberty to the captives.

The acceptable year of the LORD is upon us, and we are called to comfort those who mourn, to replace ashes with beauty, and to replace mourning with the oil of joy. We are called to be trees of righteousness, planted by the LORD for His glory. The decolonization and reconciliation of the Black Church is not a solitary endeavor but a collective calling. It requires the hand of God, working in partnership with His once-favored children, who have grown to adulthood. We pledge never to turn our backs on Him, seeking His breath of life to empower us to proclaim His name with fervor and conviction.

As we strive for decolonization and reconciliation, let us remember the divine origins of the Black Church, rooted in the liberation narrative of the Hebrew Bible. Just as God delivered the Israelites from bondage and led them to the promised land, so too can the Black Church rise above the obstacles it faces and reclaim its spiritual inheritance.

May the Black Church continue to be a beacon of hope, a source of strength, and a catalyst for transformative change. May its journey towards decolonization and reconciliation serve as an inspiration to all, as we work together to create a more just, inclusive, and loving society. And may the smile of God's blessing be upon us, bringing salvation to our souls and restoration to the Black Church.

Questions to be considered.

1. Share your personal perspective on what it means to be "Black." How does your identity shape your experiences, beliefs, and values?'
2. Reflect on the cultural, historical, and social aspects that contribute to your understanding of Blackness.
3. Reflect on the various dimensions and nuances of 'Blackness' as presented in the course materials?
4. How do these concepts empower black individuals to give meaning to their experiences and find hope?
5. Discuss the ways in which black theology allows black bodies to reclaim their humanity and resist dehumanization.
6. Why is it crucial to prioritize learning about the "decolonization of the Black Church" as a goal?
7. What steps do you think are necessary for the decolonization and reconciliation of the Black Church?
8. Why is reconciliation crucial for the Black Church, and how does it necessitate a deep commitment to justice?

Appendix E: Consent Form

General Consent Form

Class Title:
Black Church, White Religion: The Decolonization & Reconciliation of the Black Church

Researcher:
Pastor Joël

Introduction
Welcome to "Black Church, White Religion: The Decolonization & Reconciliation of the Black Church." This class is designed to introduce students to the journey towards the decolonization and reconciliation of Black Bodies and the Black Church through insightful exploration aimed at identifying and challenging the colonial influences within the Black Church. Your participation is greatly appreciated, as I am inviting you to participate in doctoral research work. Your name and likeness will not be used in the study. Please feel free to ask any questions that you may have about the research; I will be happy to explain anything in greater detail. (joeld@fcbcnyc.org)

Procedures
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to respond to the questions in breakout groups as throughout the class, and at the end questions given from reflection at the end of each class. This will take approximately 30 minutes.

Confidentiality
All responses will be kept confidential, and will only be used for this dissertation project.

Right to Withdraw
You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time, without giving a reason. You may also refuse to answer any question or participate in any activity that you do not want to.

Consent
I have read and understand the information provided above. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Participant Signature: _____

Researcher Signature: *L. J. Dautruche, D.Min* **Date:** 10 / 24/ 2023

Appendix F: Glossary

Agapē Love: (Ancient Greek ἀγάπη, agapē) is a Greco-Christian term referring to unconditional love, "the highest form of love, charity" and "the love of God for man and of man for God."

A Living Symbol: A truly living symbol compels unconscious participation, and has a life-giving, and life-enhancing effect. So long as a symbol is a living thing, it is an expression for something that cannot be characterized in any other or better way. (Griffin, David Ray. Archetypal Process. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1989. 78.)

Altruism: An approach that suggests that actions are moral if their primary purpose is to promote the best interests of others. (Northouse, Peter Guy. Leadership: Theory and Practice. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2022. 427.)

Amerika: the fascist, oppressive or racist aspect of American society.

A Relational God: A God that exists in the past, present, and future: an eternal God: a process of relevant, restorative, and revolutionary relationship anchored in the present.

Authentic Leadership: focuses on whether leadership is genuine and "real." Rather than as a fixed trait, authentic leadership which can be developed or nurtured in a leader, expands in Bodies over a lifetime. Authentic leadership can also be defined as a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development. (Northouse, Peter Guy. Leadership: Theory and Practice. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2022. 221-222; Walumbwa, Fred O., Bruce J. Avolio, William L. Gardner, Tara S. Wernsing, and Suzanne J. Peterson. "Authentic Leadership: Development and Validation of a Theory-Based Measure†." Journal of Management 34, no. 1 (2007). 94.)

Black: an experience that has a person exist in a system of racism, a life of humiliation and suffering. The symbolization of oppression and liberation in any society; a condition of a people who have as a mark of identification a color; a movement of this people, presently without consistent cohesion, to a state of consistent cohesion within their historical setting. Blackness symbolizes oppression and liberation in any society. (James H. Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation. (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1970), 12; William Augustus Jones, Jr. *God in the Ghetto* (Elgin, IL: Progressive Baptist Publishing House, 1979), back cover.)

Black Church: The Black Church transcends a mere denomination, embodying a dynamic faith community forged in the crucible of shared oppression and marginalization. becomes a living network of social advocacy, cultural expression, and unwavering hope, challenging dominant narratives and asserting the inherent dignity of all Black Bodies as full members of the human race.

Caucasian: A family of lifesystems who inhabited the Caucasus Mountains between the continents of Asia and Europe or poses ancestry who originate from Caucasus Mountains.

Christianity: a faith tradition stemming from the life, teachings, and death of Jesus of Nazareth

(The Anointed One of God).

Church: A symbolic body of practitioners who believe to be following Christ. As a Christian, Church doctrine is believed to be Gods absolute command and words.

Colonizer: A thinking pattern; a community of Bodies who desire to control and conquer other lifesystems. An effect of an ancient trauma that is perpetuated by illusions of power and absolute safety.

Community: An interconnected relational network of Bodies who are governed by a phenomenon described as God or Creator.

Conceptual Reversion: The mental grasping of eternal objects that are not yet physically realized in the temporal world, but which are proximately relevant to, and hence compatible for synthesis with, those that are already physically realized. "Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited, whereas imagination embraces the entire world, stimulating progress, giving birth to evolution. It is, strictly speaking, a real factor in scientific research." (Oleg Komlik, Albert Einstein on the Power of Ideas and Imagination in Science, Economic Sociology and Political Economy, July 31, 2019, https://economicsociology.org/2016/01/08/albert-einstein-on-the-power-of-ideas-and-imagination-in-science/.)

Consciousness: A relationship between a series of patterns of thinking. An inter-dimensional community of thoughts and emotions.

Courage: the ability to articulate one's position while considering other perspectives. The aptitude to express convictions involves risk yet fosters opportunities for meaningful dialog. Responding to objections entails tenacity but should not be confused with close-mindedness.

Creation: God created or called all things into being ("Om" is the primordial sound of the universe).

Dehumanize: to deprive Bodies of human qualities, personality, or dignity; the denial of full humanness in others and the cruelty and suffering that accompanies it. Disadvantaged: lacking in the basic resources or conditions (such as standard housing, medical and educational facilities, and civil rights) believed to be necessary for an equal position in society, especially with regards to financial or social opportunities and advantages.

Disenfranchised: deprived of some right, privilege, or immunity

Ekklesia: is a called out community or group of Bodies gathered at a public place of council who are governed by a phenomenon described as God. For the Greeks the ἐκκλησία was a legislature where all classes of people came to participate.

Empathy: the ability to sense or identify with other Body's emotions, coupled with the ability to imagine what other Bodies might be thinking or feeling; the ability to attempt to discovering the other through the Self.

Energy: [physics] the capacity for doing work. It may exist in potential, kinetic, thermal, electrical, chemical, nuclear, or other various forms. There are, moreover, heat and work—i.e., energy in the process of transfer from one body to another. $E = mc^2$ is a scientific symbol that expresses how energy is created. Mass (M) symbolizes movement or action, while the speed of Light (C) symbolizes Divine thought or ideals. The energy produced from this alchemy symbolizes potential change, imagination, or experience. When action merges with ideals, we witness experience; the manifestation of the Original Source (God) within time. (Einstein, Albert, and Robert W. Lawson. Relativity: The Special and General Theory. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001.)

Epistemological: The theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope, Epistemology is the investigation of what distinguishes justified belief from opinion. [online Dictionary]

Equality: the state of being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities.

Ethics: has its roots in the Greek word ethos, which translates to "customs," "conduct," or "character." Ethics is concerned with the kinds of values and morals an individual or a society finds desirable or appropriate. (Northouse, Peter Guy. Leadership: Theory and Practice. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2022. 423.)

GodSelf: In this dissertation, the term "GodSelf" is employed to articulate the theological understanding that God transcends gender binaries, embodying a divine essence that surpasses human categories and encompasses boundless diversity. This term serves as a theological placeholder, acknowledging the limitations of language to fully encapsulate the ineffable nature of the Divine. The use of "GodSelf" aligns with biblical perspectives that portray God beyond gender-specific attributes. God has shared from pre-literate times that "I AM WHO I AM (Exodus 3:14 NRSV)." Further, Theologians throughout history in grappling to articulate the expansiveness of God's identity remark that, the Most Divine's nature is not confined by human constructs, but in its essence transcends and encompasses all such distinctions.

Gnosticism: taught that salvation is achieved through hidden knowledge (gnosis). This knowledge usually dealt with the individual's relationship to the transcendent being (God). It denies the incarnation of God as the Son. Gnostic doctrine teaches that the world was created and ruled by a lesser divinity, the demiurge, and that the Christ was an emissary of the remote supreme divine being, esoteric knowledge (gnosis) of whom enabled the redemption of the human spirit.

Hopefulness: The receptivity to the future possibilities of God. The cultivation of thankfulness for our heritages and expectation for our future ministries engenders a guard against cynicism and a spirit of perseverance during times of stress and disorientation.

Humility: The capacity to recognize reliable sources of informed judgment while recognizing the limits of our knowledge and the fallibility of our judgments.

Hypostasis: the distinguishing element in God, the concrete, intellectual individuality, existing in itself.

Imagination: Imagination (Whitehead) - (Conceptual Reversion)-To think otherwise than the fact (presented evidence)- to think freely- free thought. the manifestation of thought. Imagination cannot be coercive (power), instead it is persuasive (relational). The imagination's aim is to help define things

Imago Christi: Latin for the image of Christ; the imitation of Yeshua helps Bodies experience the agapē love of God; God's own self-actualization through and care for humankind.

Imago Dei: Latin for the image of God; God's own self-actualization through and care for humankind; a theological doctrine common to Abrahamic traditions that denotes humankind's symbolical relation to God as the very image of God as human nature allows God to be made manifest in human Bodies.

Imitatio Christi: Latin for the imitation of Christ; the attempt to live and act as Yeshua lived and acted.

Imitatio Dei: Latin for imitation of God; the edict that Bodies imitate the ways of God by imitating the Divine attributes of showing and extending agapē love to other Bodies.

Immanence: The immanence of God refers to The Most Divine's relationship to the world – that God actively operates within it, sustains it as its effective cause, and is continually present (i.e. omnipresent).

Indecent: A process founded on opposite grounds. An Indecent Theology will always come from the margins of imprecision, and mismatches. (Marcella Althaus-Reid, Indecent Theology Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics (London U.K.: Routledge, 2010), 64)

Justice: just behavior or treatment, fairness. The virtue which consists in giving to everyone what is his/her due, practical conformity to the laws and principles of rectitude in the dealings of humanity with one another.

Equality: the state of being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities.

kin-dom: For this dissertation, the use of "kin-dom" embodies a deliberate theological stance prioritizing dismantling oppressive structures and crafting communities rooted in justice, equality, and shared responsibility, ultimately emphasizing liberation from all forms of domination.

Laicity: the mutual fellowship of believers - refers to the value of the human in relationship within the church, founded on grace anthropology.

Liberation: The act or process of freeing a lifesystem or Body from the control and or enslavement of absolute past ideas of power.

Lifesystem: [a living thing] Inclusive of a variety of religious, and faith traditions, as well as mystical, and metaphysical belief system. (Harris, Melanie L. Ecowomanism: African American Women and Earth-Honoring Faiths. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017. 112.)

Light: Organic chaotic information that is also an energy source. Light is a kind of wave that carries energy from one space to another space. Light can move throughout empty space (unlike sound waves). Light waves are made of a mixture of electricity and magnetism, so they are called electromagnetic waves. Light moves about 186,000 miles (300,000kilometers) per second. This means a beam of light could go 7.5 times around the world in one second.

Meta: A prefix meaning "transcending."

Metamodernism: A structure of feeling that emerges from and reacts to the postmodern as much as it is a cultural logic that corresponds to today's stage of global capitalism. (Robin Van Den Akker, Alison Gibbons, and Timotheus Vermeulen, eds., Metamodernism - Historicity, Affect, and Depth after Postmodernism. New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017, 5.)

Meta-Spirituality: An emotionally intelligent & inclusive consciousness (a way of thinking & being) that is between religion and spirituality emerging from a 21st century "meaning crisis:" millennials migrating from religion in the U.S.

Mutual Immanence: We are affected by God just as much as God is affected by us in the past, present, and future. God, and the world also remain mutually transcendent such that any world happening owes it to its existence its own actualization as its own decision of unification of its relationality. (Alfred North Whitehead, et al., Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology (New York: Free Press, 1985), 348; Andrew M Davis, Mind, Value, and Cosmos. On the Relational Nature of Ultimacy (Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Publ, 2021), 199.)

Ontological: relating to the branch of metaphysics dealing with the nature of being.

Openness: the desire to engage in open-ended search for knowledge of God, including receptivity to different ideas, experiences, and people. Listening becomes a discipline that acknowledges the other and respects diversity. The art of being a student and a teacher is an ongoing process that necessitates hospitality patience and love.

Oppressed: For this dissertation, I define oppressed as Bodies being entangled in distorted power dynamics that prevent their full participation in the creative process resulting from systemic injustices and deficient actualizations that exploit and marginalize certain groups. Additionally, the oppressed can be seen as Bodies subjected to systemic and institutional forces of domination, including racism, sexism, poverty, and colonialism.

Othered: a view by which a person or a group is treated as intrinsically different to others within a set social group: a phenomenon which negates a person or group from their humanity.

Peace: a state of quiet or tranquility; freedom from disturbance or agitation; freedom from war or internal commotion; that quiet, order and security which is guaranteed by the laws.

Phenomenology: The aim of Phenomenology is to clarify describe and make sense of the structures and dynamics of pre-reflective human experiences, were as hermeneutics aims to articulate the reflective character of the human experience as it manifests in languages and forms of creative signs. (Oxford Handbooks online Rene' Rosfort mar 2019)

Power: the capacity of some persons to produce intended, and foreseen effects on others. (Dennis Hume Wrong, Power, Its Forms, Bases, and Uses (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 2.)

Prayerfulness: the making of space to commune with God. The tack of learning and teaching so that we are formed into the image of Christ through the Spirit involves our consistent reliance on God's sanctifying work.

Pre-history: the history of human culture before written records or human documentation.

Privilege: a right, immunity, or benefit enjoyed by a particular person or a restricted group of people beyond the advantages of most.

Privileged: abounding in not only the basic but also the superfluous resources and conditions (such as housing, medical and educational facilities, and civil rights) believed to be necessary for an equal position in society, especially with regards to financial or social opportunities and advantages.

Pluralism: Religious pluralism is not simply the sociological fact that there are many different religions. A religious pluralist is to make two assertions. First, these Bodies reject any claim that their own religion is the only true or valid religious tradition. Second, the Bodies are open in principle, in other words, to the possibility that other religions are also be valid, thus legitimizing all belief systems as unique but equally viable approaches to a shared end goal.

Prophetic Ministry: The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us. - to hold together criticism and energizing, for I should urge that either by itself is not faithful to our best tradition. (Walter Brueggemann, The Practice of Prophetic Imagination (Seoul: Scripture Union Press, 2017), 3-4.)

Public: done, perceived, or existing in open view; a place accessible or visible to all.

Queer: Whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. (Lisa Isherwood and Marcella Althaus-Reid, Trans/Formations (London: SCM Press, 2009), 17.)

Racism: prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior, the belief that all members of each race possess characteristics or abilities specific to that race, especially to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or races.

Reconciliation: The end of the estrangement, caused by choices perceived as evil, between God and human Bodies; the peace between human Bodies and God that results from the expiation

of religious sin and the propitiation of God's wrath involving a change in the relationship between God and humanity or Human Bodies and other Human Bodies.

Relational Transparency: Refers to being open and honest in presenting one's true self to others. -Relational transparency occurs when individuals share their core feeling, motives and inclinations with others in an appropriate manner. (Peter Guy Northouse, Leadership: Theory and Practice (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2022), 229.)

Right: Conformity to the will of God or to his law, the perfect standard of truth and justice; a power, privilege, moral or legal claim which correctly belongs to a person by law, by nature, or by tradition, to correct a wrong; to restore to normal or correct condition.

Seeker: A seeker is a Body or lifesystem searching and journeying for Source.

Self: The archetypal Self, as we have noted, is not the center of the field of consciousness (not the ego) but is a deeper organizing principle to which ego-consciousness must become related. (C. Michael Smith, Jung and Shamanism in Dialogue: Retrieving the Soul, Retrieving the Sacred (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), 120.)

Shadow: The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance. Indeed, self-knowledge as a psychotherapeutic measure frequently requires much painstaking work extending over a long period. (C. G. Jung and Joseph Campbell, The Portable Jung (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 145.)

Spirit: Life giving, and death evoking energy. [evoke: bring or recall to the conscious mind. (present)] Energy.

Symbolism: Symbolism is no mere idle fancy or corrupt degeneration; it is inherent in the very texture of human life. Language itself is a symbolism. (Alfred North Whitehead, Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect)

Theology: The first half of theology is “theo,” which means God in Greek. The suffix -ology means the study of, so theology literally means the study of God, we usually expand it to mean the study of religious faith, practice, and the study of God's relation to the world.
Theo-Poetry: Poetry focused on expressing a temporary image of God.

Transcendence: A theological term that, when referring to the Christian’s perspective of God, states that God is outside of the universe and is independent of it and its properties. God is other, independent, and different from God's creations, beyond it and not limited by creation or to creation.

Transformational Leadership: is a process that changes and transforms people. It is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals. It includes accessing followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them. It is a process that often incorporates

charismatic and visionary leadership. (Northouse, Peter Guy. Leadership: Theory and Practice. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2022. 185.)

Umvelinqangi: Divine Consciousness or the inner light of creation.

Unwabu: the chameleon

White Body Privilege: the societal privilege that benefits white Bodies over non-white Bodies, particularly if they are otherwise under the same social, political, or economic circumstances.

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